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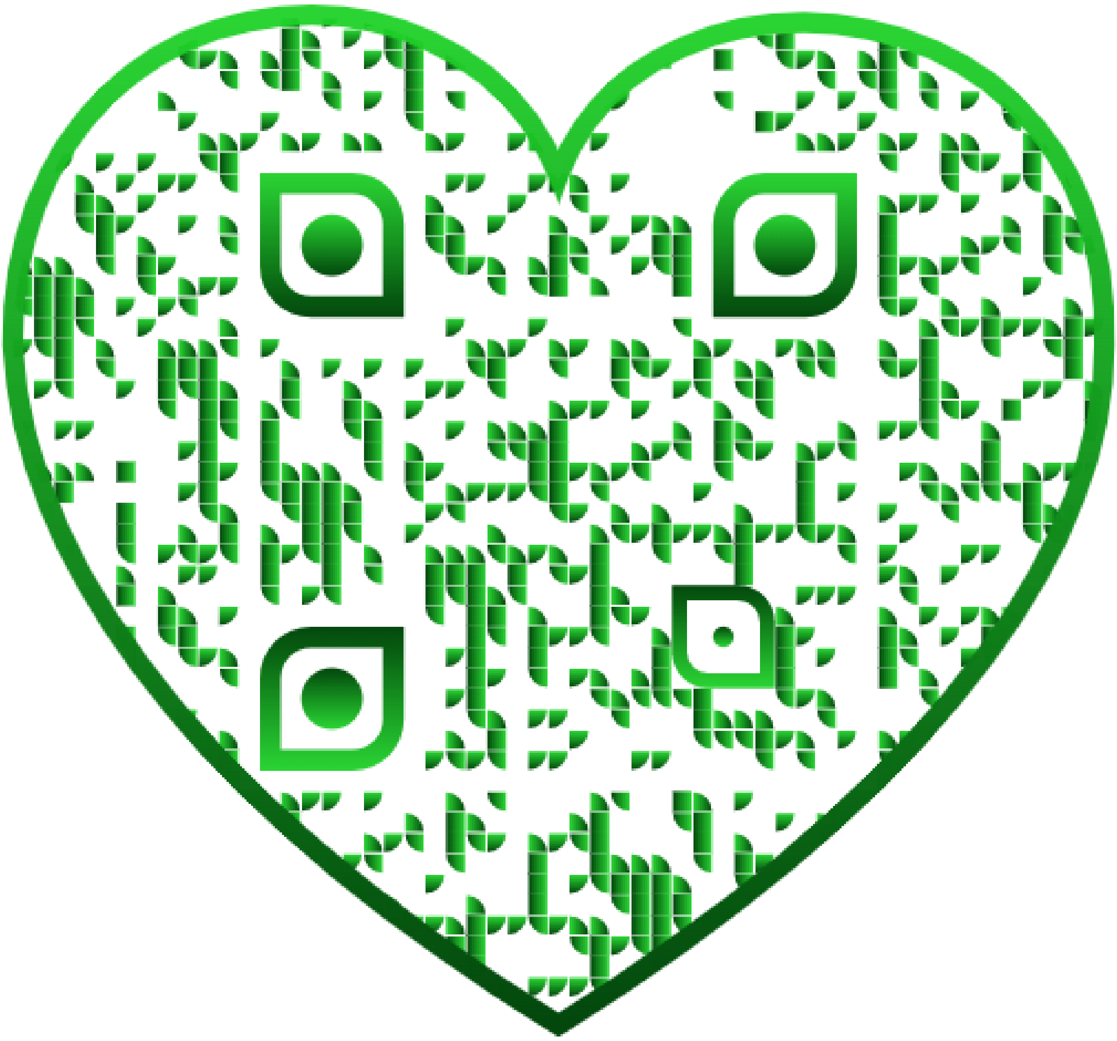

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EDITORIAL

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO...

Every so often, while watching a classic film or TV series, there will be someone whose performance is so great that it's worth checking out their other roles. It surprises me how many lesser-known actors and actresses there are who give up their career in showbusiness despite an obvious talent that would have seen them reach the very top.

You'll discover in our interview with Gary Warren, best known as Peter Waterbury in the definitive version of The Railway Children, why he decided to leave the profession. Things turned out well for him, however, but it wouldn't be too difficult to imagine him having a long and celebrated acting career.

Another former actor who has been interviewed for this issue is Paul J Medford, who played original EastEnders character Kelvin Carpenter. After a successful career in West End musicals, he took a back seat, and although no longer on our screens, continues to make award-winning television from the other side of the camera.

Given how many different storylines there are in soap operas at any one time, it's little wonder why this branch of drama has such a high turnover of actors. There are plenty who had their 15 minutes of fame before disappearing from our screens, and I'm sure there are some who made an impression on you.

Perhaps there's a former actor you'd like us to track down and speak to. If so, why not write in with your suggestions?

Simon Stabler

BARGAIN BASEMENT

Have you got 10p? **Cardinal Cox** has

Don't we all love a bargain? My day job is around the corner from a non-specific supermarket, so, twice a day (before and after work), I like to see what they've put out with a yellow label on it. Even the colour of the label is designed to attract the eye. First is the general produce and the meat. Individual pies that should be a couple of quid down to 68p? They'll do for some Saturday lunches, a handful of them, thank you.

Then it's the bread, biscuits and cake trolley. Snacks for the team? Who can say no? Though sometimes this also proves to be an assortment of other gubbins too. Kiddy colouring books for 30p? Get a fiver's worth of them to drop-in the food bank so some child can have half an hour of fun. Money well spent.

It's the reduced cases of non-alcoholic beer that have a can or two missing that makes me wonder if there's a disappointed shoplifter somewhere.

The reduced fruit and veg section next for a quick perusal. I wouldn't normally bother but blackberries with a bit knocked off can brighten up a breakfast or two.

There was a time last autumn when the store was trying to shift its stock of bottles of bitter lemon. I don't know how much they had in the warehouse, but you'd find them everywhere. Any little gap on any shelf, be it in the pet food, household cleaning products, stationery, in went a couple of bottles.

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But you have to contain your enthusiasm when you find a bargain. Would you eat it full price? The grab bag of crisps that are brushing up against a sell-by date might look appealing until you get it home and realise the flavour is fiery hot.

Then there's the danger of the inexpertly applied yellow label. A wrinkle on the label and then the bar code won't scan. Or worse, when they weren't positioned in the printer carefully and the last couple of bars are missing. Then it's time to swap your glasses and punch the numbers... twice... as you got a number wrong because the ink was faded.

But very occasionally there's a real victory. Once I bought three reduced pizzas (good pre-drinking grub) which still had the multi-saver discount, meaning the supermarket ended up owing me 10p.

Simple pleasures.

Next issue: Spangles

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PAST AND PRESENT

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Cover: Jenny Agutter, Bernard Cribbins, Gary Warren and Sally Thomsett in a scene from The Railway Children.

Photograph: Shutterstock (Expanded and coloured by Stuart Humphryes)

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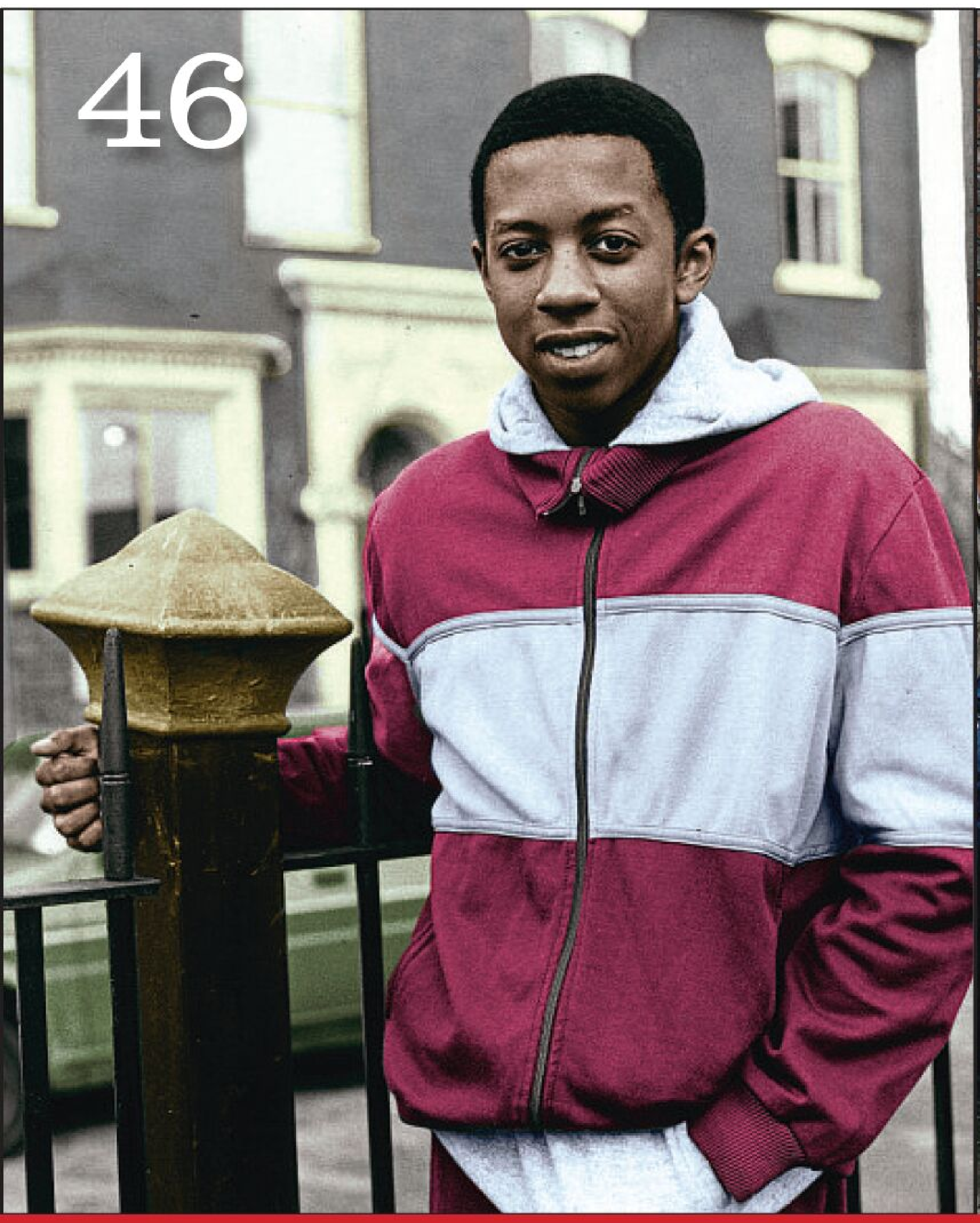

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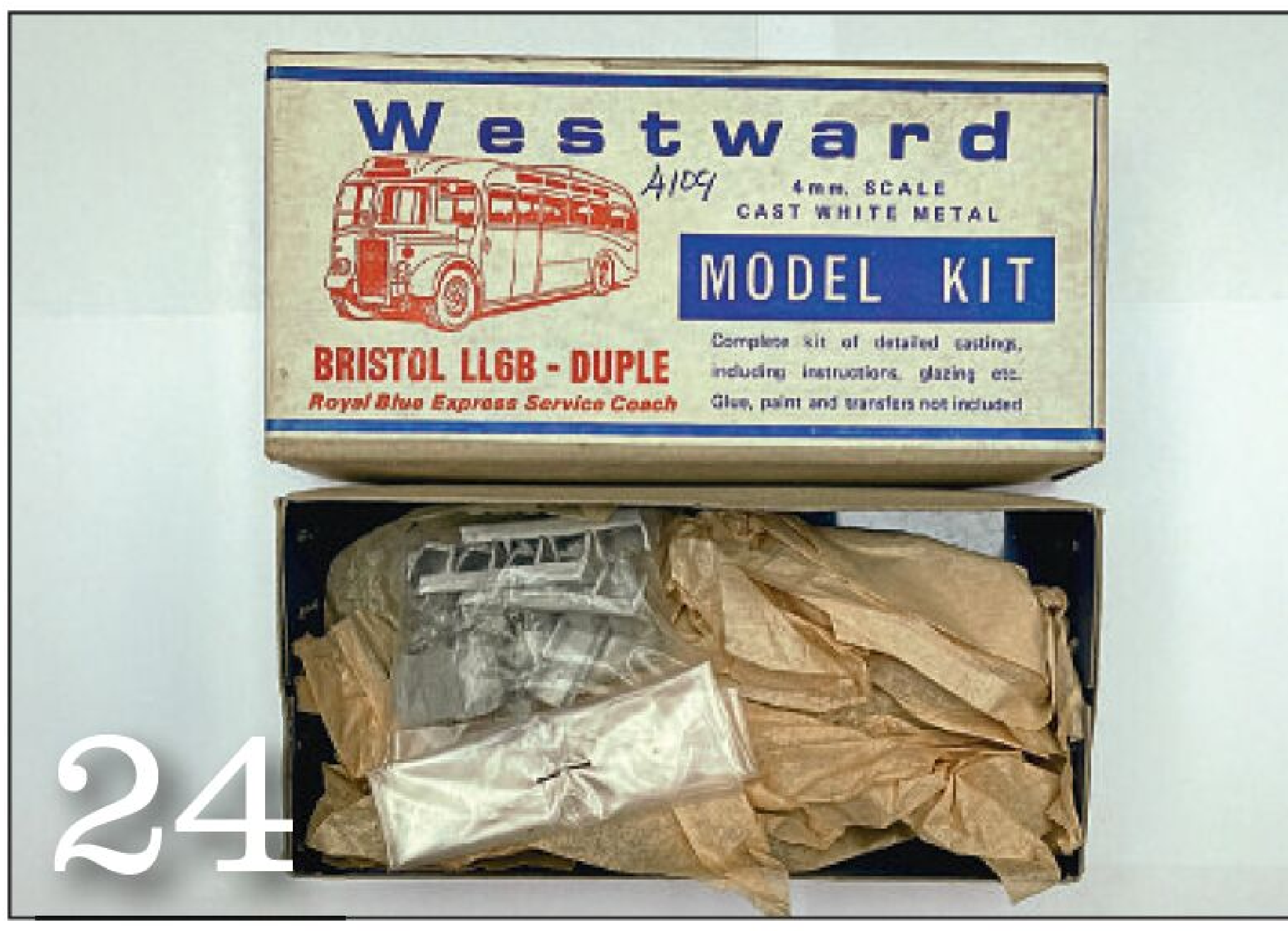
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Postbag

The Editor welcomes letters for this section. Pictures are appreciated. Letters may be edited so that we can include as many as possible

A Cheap Day Out

Dear Simon,

Each time I receive my copy of BoB, a read of Postbag or Yesterday Remembered sparks a memory.

Reading what Jon Harris had to say about a thanksgiving service for a friend (Postbag: The Cheap Seats, October) reminded me of an outing I had with my daughter when she was about five years old.

A small circus came to town, and she said she'd love to see it. Off we went and I took with me a couple of cushions because I knew we'd be sitting on wooden benches. Also, for the interval, I took a drink each and a piece of homemade cake. I knew that after paying the entrance fee, I wouldn't be able to afford the hire of cushions etc. So, I understand completely why the lady took her own ice-cream to the cinema. Whenever I went out, I always took a drink or something to eat with me. I must admit I've never taken ice-cream.

The years have now gone by and I'm able to afford to enter a bar here in Italy. However, when I come home, I find cups of tea or coffee and cake way too expensive, so now I fill a thermal mug and take a couple of biscuits with me.

Thank you for the continued pleasure your magazine brings me.

With best wishes
Chris Colussi
Casarsa della Delizia, Pordenone, Italy

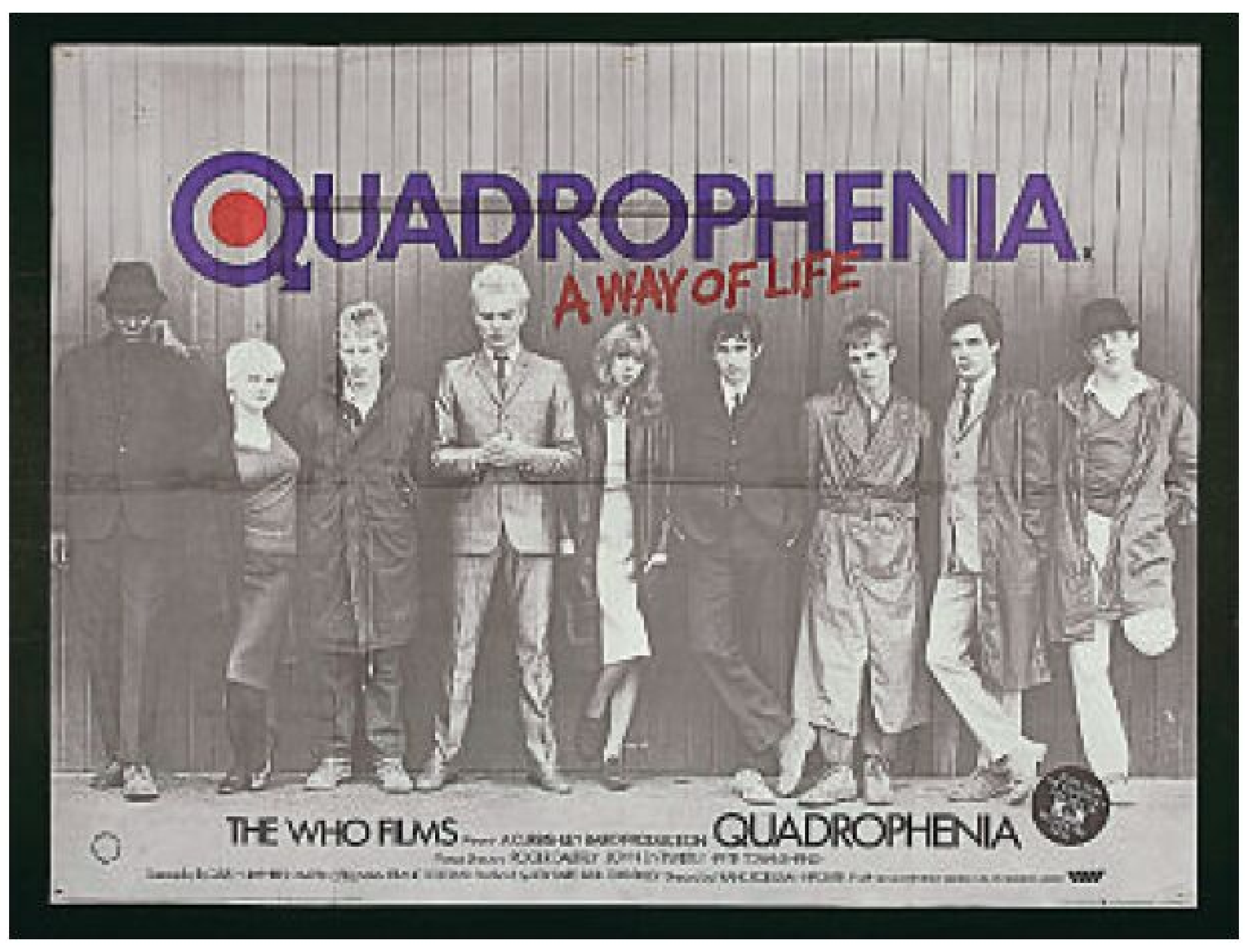
"Know the face"

Dear Simon,

I loved the article about Quadrophenia (Brighton Rocks, August 2024). I first saw it way back in the 1980s and it was a revelation to me. Stoned teenagers beating each other up was not how I imagined the 1960s.

It was interesting to see so many recognisable actors in Quadrophenia: Steve from Metal Mickey (Gary Shail); Carver from The Bill (Mark Wingett); and Phil Davis who would go on to star alongside Mel Gibson in the film The Bounty (1984) and one of my favourite UK television shows, the great/brilliant Whitechapel. I always find the subject of the "know the face" actors fascinating.

On a totally different note, I was amazed to read that Hammer Films (Hammer Humour, July 2024) made film versions of TV comedies such as Man About the House and On the Buses. Like most people, I thought they just did crime and horror.



Keep up the good work.

"Ironside"
Australia

Love Shine a Light

Dear Simon,

I was so pleased to see the photo and article about St Mary's church in Walthamstow (Window on the Past, October 2024).

In November 1946, I was one of the bridesmaids at my cousin Bill and Iris's wedding. The wedding was timed for 3.30pm, which was rather late, but this was because the groom's mother had four brothers all of whom were licensees in off licences in Walthamstow. Every beer shop (as they were commonly named) had, by law, to be kept open until 3pm.

By the time the service was over, it had become dark but the couple wanted photos taken outside the church. Life was still very restricted and there was no street lighting outside, so the brothers all turned the cars to face the couple and switched their headlights on us. It seems where there's a will for a wedding, there's a way.

Photograph: The Francis Frith Collection

G Skinner
Waltham Forest, London

Charles Front

Loch Over There

Dear Simon,

Thank you for the calendar for 2025, which came with the December 2024 issue.

A quick glance through it and September/October's picture struck a chord. Some years ago, I stayed in the hotel on Loch Lomond, directly opposite the Loch Sloy Hydro-Electric Scheme. I enclose a photo I took from across the loch. The other photo is of the hotel itself. The Inversnaid Hotel is a very old hotel with a waterfall. The boat in the foreground was used to take guests across to the other side of the loch to save a long journey by road. It took all day to get there but was well worth it.

Going to the December issue of Best of British, I was taken to the London Eye (A Capital View) by some kind neighbours (sadly gone now). It was a great experience. This was in its early years. The view is probably different now with all the new buildings.

The Good Doctor by Ken Gaines (Yesterday Remembered) reminded me of the two family doctors we had, Dr Jackson and Dr Paget. Both in the same house but at different times, of course. They knew all about you and had the "bedside manner". Now, with group practices, you don't know who you are going to see and, as for "bedside manner", forget it.

Don Alcott wrote about For Whom the Bell Tolls (Yesterday Remembered) and polishing the Probus club bell. I used to polish all my brass with Brasso. Can you still buy it? I'm not sure I could be bothered now, even if I could get it.

Finally, I stayed in Rhyl on holiday once (Postbag: Daytrip to Rhyl). I don't think there was a hovercraft then. Too late for that, I expect.

Maisie Dance
Purley, Surrey

Brasso is still available from supermarkets and other stores.

Can you help?

Wanted: 1950-1955 Ian Allan British Railways combined engine number books with no markings and their original paper covers.

Brian Deamer, 20 East Drive, Sawbridgeworth, Hertfordshire CM21 9EU Tel: 01279 725455

I am very interested in Leyland Super Comet lorries and am trying to track down anyone who might have photos of the lorries that they could supply me with.

Michael Clancy, 18 Hampshire Avenue, Slough, Berkshire SL1 3AQ

Does anyone have any information of a Dutch football team called KMVZ, a club from Amsterdam. in particular, there was a tour hosted by KMVZ and including my local team, Barkingside FC, in 1966, along with Witney FC. Any information on KMVZ and this tour would be greatly appreciated.

Rob Meyers, 123 Ashurst Drive, Barkingside, Ilford, Essex IG6 1HA

My father, Henry Baker, was born in Sittingbourne, Kent in 1914. He arrived in Wellington, New Zealand during the end of 1943. I would love to hear from anyone who knew my dad's brothers – who I believe were George, Stephen and James – and sister Lydia.

Steve Baker, PO Box 40-469, Glenfield, Auckland 0747, New Zealand Tel: 09 443 8080, Email: smlhosn@xtra.co.nz

Does anybody know the whereabouts of Peter Bonner who went to Warren School in Chadwell Heath, 1984-85. He's got a brother, David Bonner, and his friend was Ian Stanley.

Sarah Reynolds (nee Cook), 11 Tavistock Close, Harold Hill, Romford RM3 8HF

Information and photos are sought on the families who once lived in the Layerthorpe area of York, an area that has changed beyond recognition. If you once resided or worked in this area or had relatives who did, we are looking to add to our archive and at the same time preserve these photos for future generations.

Jane Burrows – Tang Hall Local History Group, Tel: 07522 402945 Email: tanghallhistory@gmail.com

Requests for information, friends and family searches and reunion announcements can be included here free of charge. Send any requests, written as concisely as possible, to Can You Help?, Best of British, Mortons Media Group Ltd, Media Centre, Morton Way, Horncastle, Lincolnshire LN9 6JR or by email to info@bestofbritishmag.co.uk

Holding the Reins

Dear Simon,

I would never have expected my company – in its earliest years – to have acquired a shop in the heart of Hampshire's New Forest. I lived on the edge of the forest and was told as area manager I could add it to the list of other stores I was responsible for. The shop was in a unique position, surrounded by wild New Forest ponies roaming everywhere in a truly beautiful environment.

When I first visited the shop, I realised it was vital I got to know the staff and any problems, if any. A mature woman called Gracie was effectively the manager. She clearly knew the shop from end to end and she took charge of the ordering, administration and staff. For any store like this, she was a real treasure.

However, she had had an altercation with a director I knew who was, in truth, self-important and who did not listen enough to anyone. The director visited the store, parking his fine car as near to the shop as he could. As it happened, Gracie could see this from her office window and the arrival of an oldish man – who, in time, we called "Colonel" – who jumped off the horse he had ridden to the shop.

Seeing the director, the oldish man thrust the reins into the director's hands with the request: "Look after the reins for a couple of minutes while I go into the shop for my baccy and newspaper. Thank you, old chap, thank you."

The telephone rang and Gracie answered it, finding herself speaking to the company's CEO. He sounded angry and asked if the director was there. "Yes and no," Gracie answered, much to his annoyance. She went on to say that he was outside, holding the reins of a customer's horse. The CEO demanded she get him to the phone as quickly as possible.

Gracie said she would but in truth made her way slowly outside and told the director the CEO wanted him on the phone as quickly as possible. Gracie got someone to hold the reins, and she returned to the office, but the director was already on the telephone. She was not allowed to remain in the office, unsurprisingly.

When the director finally emerged, he told Gracie he had to leave immediately and gave her the telephone number of where he would be. As he was leaving, he turned to Gracie and asked her what she had told the CEO. "Only the truth – where you were, what you were doing – only the truth," she said.

I cannot say whether or not the previous altercation he had had with Gracie had influenced anything but he should not have tangled with Gracie – that was unwise.

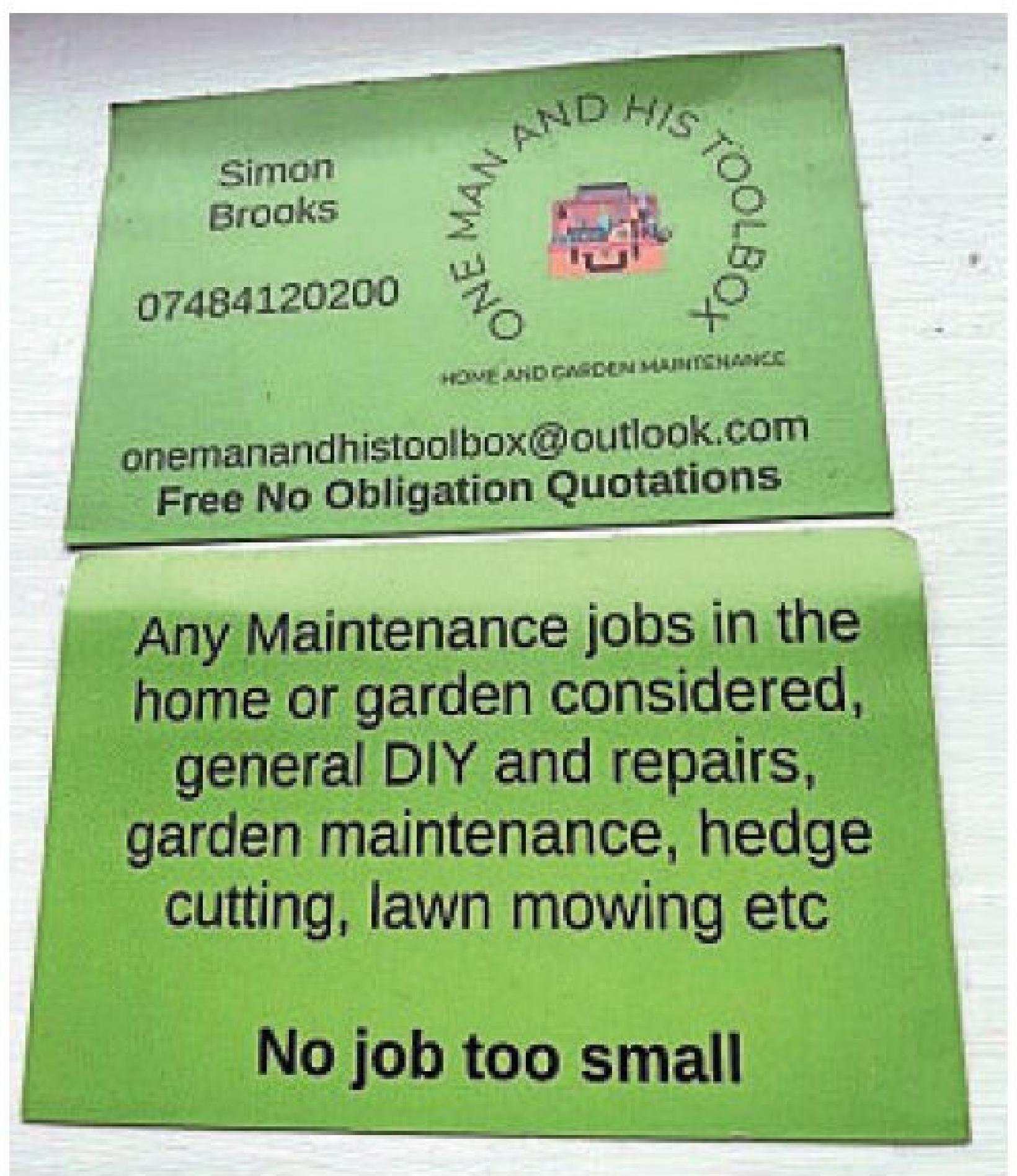
Colin Macleod
Beauly, Inverness

One Man and His Toolbox

Dear Simon,

I am writing in relation to your request for local tradesmen who have done good in our own areas (December).

Earlier this year, I wanted some garden slabs to be lifted and relaid. After asking two local traders, who decided not to call back (couldn't be bothered, I think), and some from further afield (same thing), a flyer appeared through my letterbox from a young lad trading under the name One Man and His Toolbox.



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Regards

Ray Darby
Woodhall Spa,
Lincolnshire

Northanger Hanky

Dear Simon,

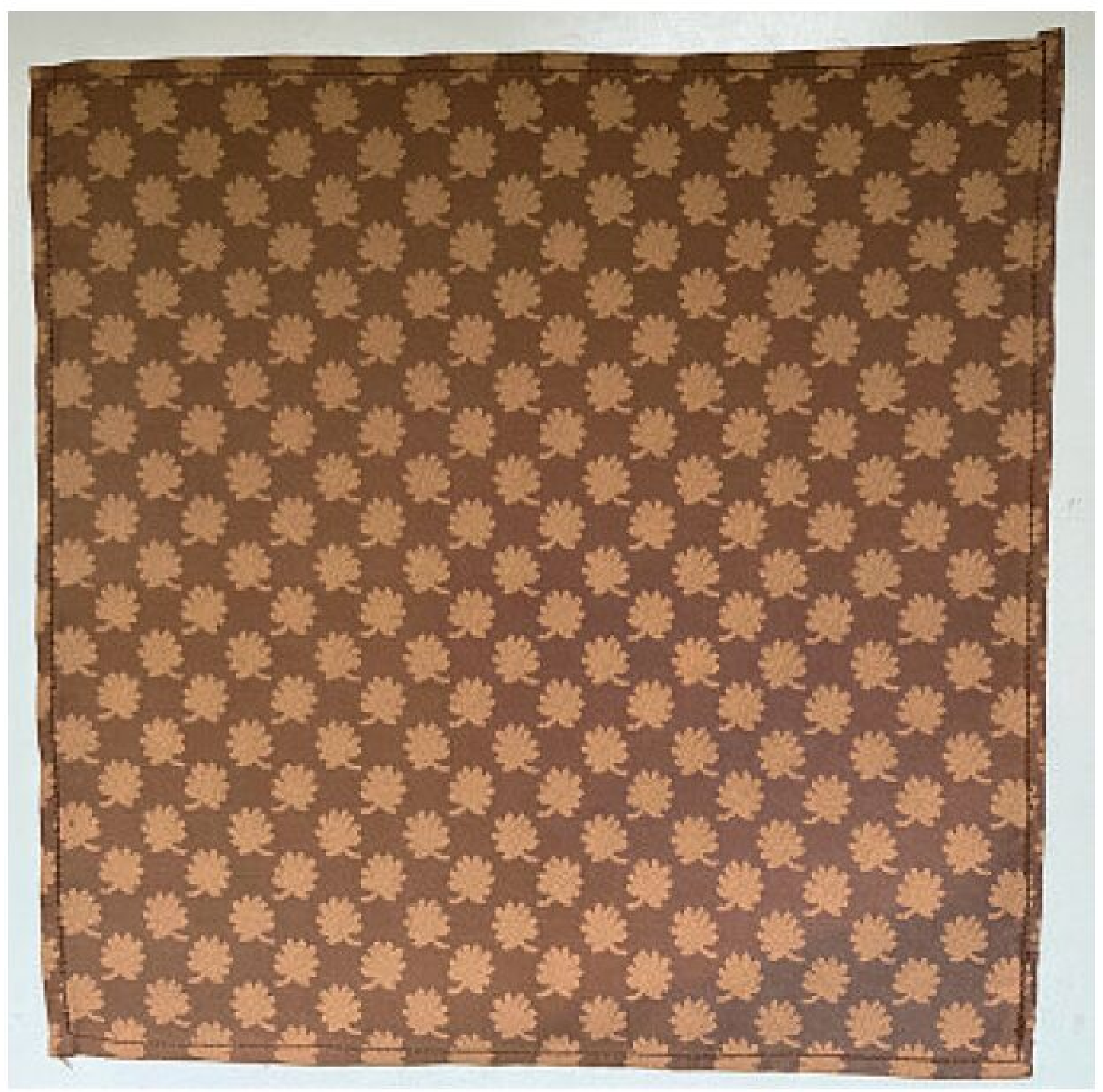
I've just started the January Best of British and, as always, am finding so much of interest.

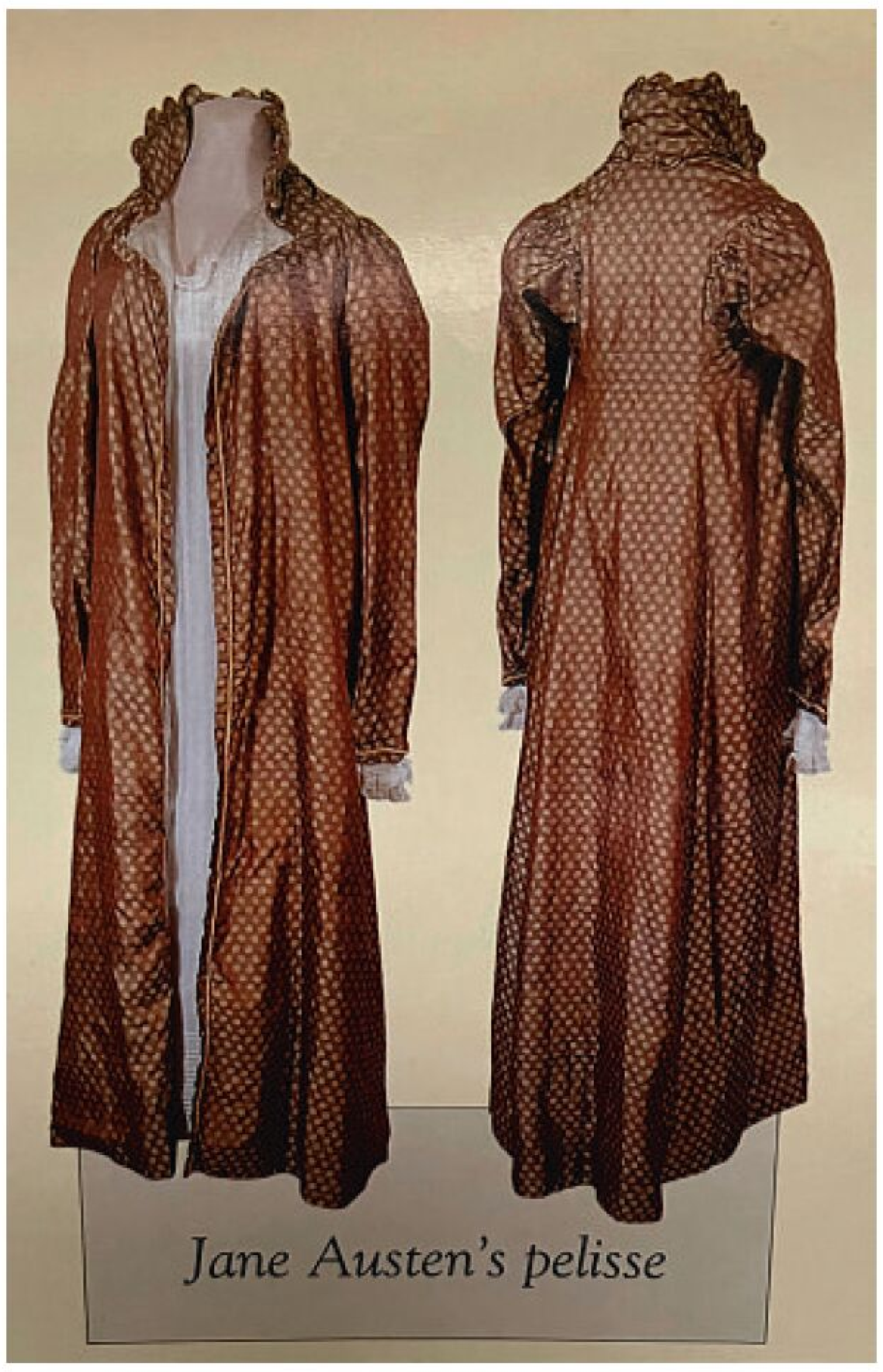
On reading Claire Saul's article, Aus-tenacious, I was reminded of when my husband Peter and I visited Jane Austen's house at Chawton 15 years ago.

As we had previously enjoyed a fascinating tour of Whitchurch Silk Mill, I was delighted to find on sale a silk handkerchief that had been woven at the mill. The design is Oakleaf and replicates a pelisse (frockcoat) that had been worn by Jane Austen.

Yours sincerely,

Brenda Mathews
Burgess Hill, West Sussex





Jane Austen's pelisse

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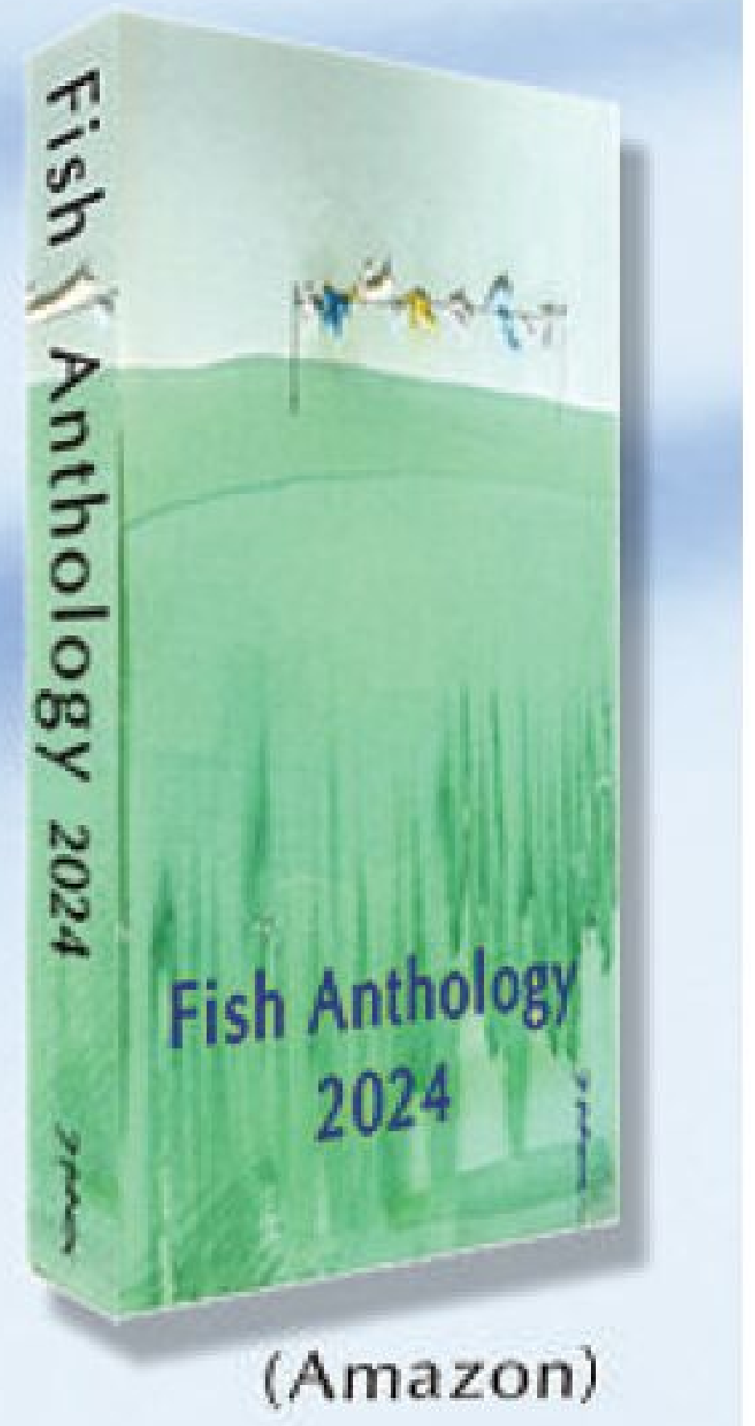

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Too Many Hours

Dear Simon,

At the age of 25, I became a bus driver. I worked at the South Bank bus depot (near Middlesbrough).

It was 1960. I doubt a bus driver now would be able to comprehend the hours we could work. Looking back, I find it hard to believe. There were no restrictions. If you could stay awake, you were allowed to drive. Let me assure you, the examples I will give you are facts.

I will start with a Friday because you also had a dance special after the evening shift. You would be picked up by the staff bus to get you to the depot for 5am. You could do a nine-hour shift (5.15am-2.15pm) with a 40-minute meal break. When your shift finished, you could go at once on to a nine-hour back shift (2.20-11.20pm, with a 40-minute break). You had that day driven 18 hours with just two 40-minute breaks.

Was it now home and time to rest? No. You could now do a dance special leaving Redcar or Saltburn at 1am. By the time you actually got home, it would be after 2am. Time for a nice long sleep? Don't you believe it. You would be allowed to be back at work on the Saturday at 5am and allowed to work two nine-hour shifts. When finished, you were allowed to do a midnight dance special, getting home after 1am on Sunday.

In 48 hours, you had driven for approximately 36 hours. I have seen drivers come into the rest room on their meal break and simply fall asleep, needing to be woken up to take their bus over.

SPECIAL M
99
JDC 599

You could do double shifts day after day. I know this because I have done it. Needs must when you have a family. Like many drivers, I could go three or four days and not see my children awake. Three doubles a week was my limit. Plenty did more.

This stopped when new rules were introduced. If you finished work at 11.30pm, you could not drive until a certain number of hours had passed. The new rules probably put a good few years on the lives of some drivers. Less money but more rest. All's well that ends well.

David Sim
Normanby, Middlesbrough, North Yorkshire

Escaping to the Country

Dear Simon,

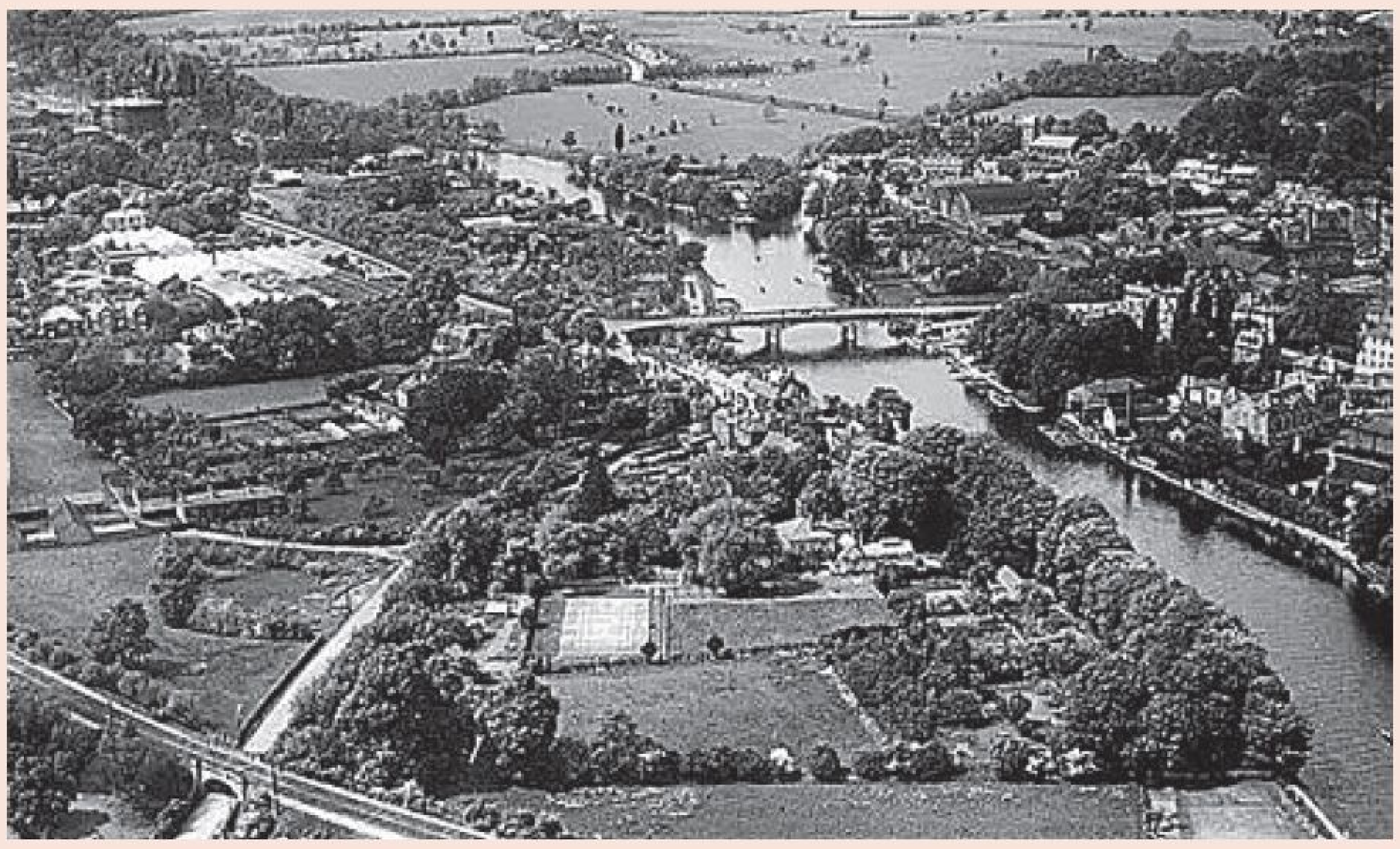
After getting good advice from my father in a letter during the war, my mother decided to do her own version of Escape to the Country. So, with my sister and me and one suitcase, she left London. After going from pillar to post, we arrived at my aunt's house at a place called Egham Hythe in Surrey.

Although being only 20 or so miles from the capital, it really was in the countryside at that time. There were quite a few farms in the area still being used for various needs. I remember cows holding up the traffic on the main road near to where we lived.

My aunt's house only had two bedrooms, so we all slept in one of them, together with my father when he was home on leave. The man who owned the house was a harvesting contractor and he had eight or 10 houses built for his workers. There were giant steam engines and caravans scattered about, where quite a few workers lived, all the year round. As I was the only child down our road who was not at school yet, my aunt would let me go out for the day with the man who took supplies to the workers from his lorry.

If you went to Egham, just on the outskirts sat Runnymede, a meadow at the foot of Cooper's Hill near the River Thames. I remember a few years later going on a river steamer up the Thames to Windsor and beyond.

Opposite my aunt's house was a field where some horses were kept, and my mother would feed them when she could. At the top of our road was a pub where the Home Guard would disappear after finishing parade on a Sunday morning. We would rush up the road to get a glimpse of the band that was to accompany them on their march.



Not far from where I lived as a small boy was another village called Thorpe. Apart from being a play area, it had a hill called St Ann's where monks lived many years ago and there was a tunnel that went all the way to Chertsey Abbey. We never went into it as it had become dangerous over the years. But this hill was a very beautiful spot and at that time had a few red squirrels there.

There was also an old-fashioned tea house just down the road, next to a stream with weeping willows either side of it. Again, for a treat, my aunt would take us there as my mother was working. So, I had a great childhood because my mother had escaped to the country.

Yours
Bobby Knottley
Nottingham, Nottinghamshire

Photograph: (Bus) Creative Commons/Pimlico Badger

Pilchards and Punishment

Dear Simon,

Once again, I would like to write about an episode from my telegram boy days at Hammersmith Post Office in 1944/45, where we had 20 boys in our office for the delivery of telegrams in that part of west London.

It used to be a particular joy for us all to enjoy a 30-minute lunch break that was devoted to tins of sardines or pilchards, all covered in rich tomato sauce and a bread roll with a cup of steaming cocoa. What a diet – and we never changed, always the same snack. Just the job for a group of active young boys.

One day, I was in the office and enjoying my snack with a few other lads. We were seated by the "cage" that received the telegrams in small tubes which were sent down from the instrument room just above our delivery area via a pneumatic tube system – similar to those in some large stores.

This was the quickest way of getting the telegrams from the lady operators at the teleprinter for urgent delivery, and we would return any problem telegrams in the same way to their cage in the instrument room.

One day, I said to a colleague: "I wonder how strong the suction is in the tube system?" and I held my pilchard up by the tail and gradually neared the tube flap. Suddenly, there was a whoosh, and the pilchard was up the tube, leaving me holding the tail, horrified how quick it all was.

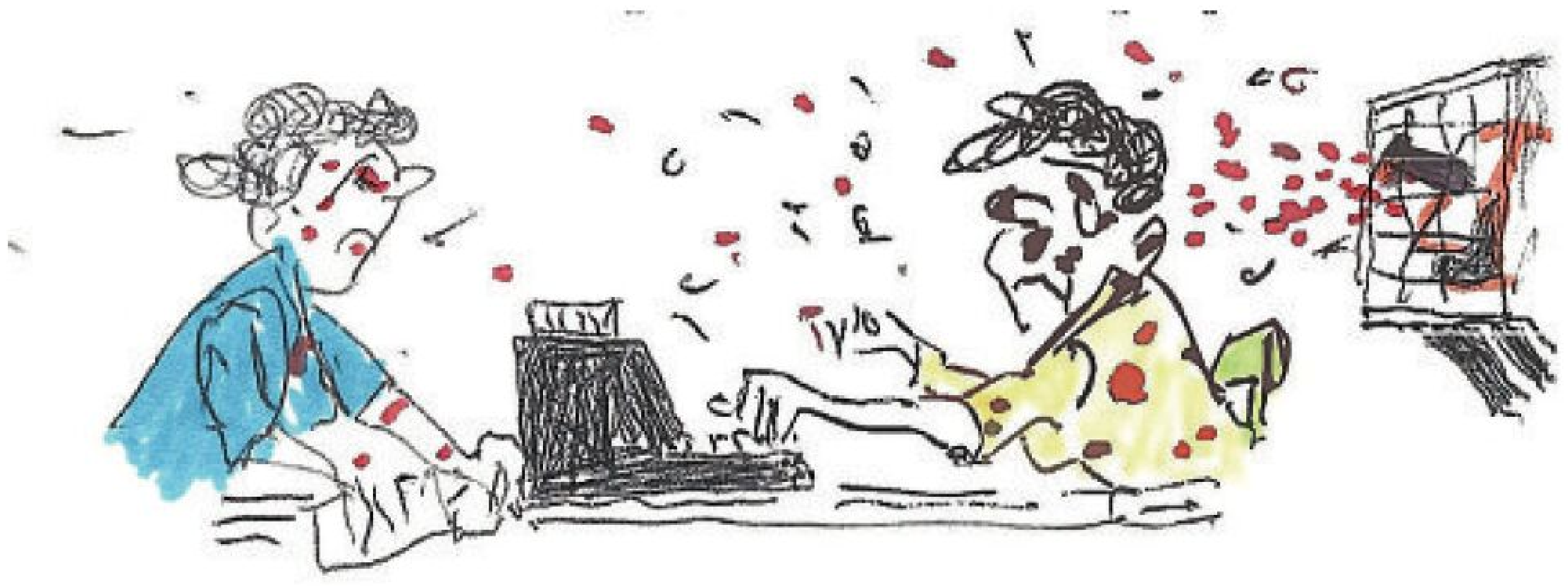
It was a daft thing to do that was made worse by the results. The fish apparently "fired" into the operators' cage and burst and sprayed the two lady operators with bits of fish and blobs of tomato sauce. To say they were not amused is an understatement and they reported the incident immediately to the counter overseer.

He was very stern and came down to our delivery room and asked who the culprit was. The boys were grinning, but I put my hand up with a few mumbled apologies. I was taken back to his office and told to say sorry to the two girls and I was given two days' "punishment duty" that was without pay and had to be served at a Kensington office that was open for delivery on a Sunday.

The overseer warned me that any further problems from me could result in my dismissal, so I had to make sure I did not bother him again. I was quite horrified at this outcome, as I did not want to lose my job and well and truly learned my lesson.

Mind you, I heard later that when the overseer had been called into the instrument room and saw the tomato covered girls, he burst out laughing but this did not stop him from punishing me.

Ron McGill
Guildford, Surrey



The Collector

I first latched on to the Radio Times in the early 70s as my Nan kept a pile of them, along with the TV Times, in the attic or alternatively in the front room cupboard, which had a not unpleasant odour of washing powder or fabric softener. Unfortunately, most of these priceless magazines were eventually thrown out after yours truly was let loose with a pair of scissors, extracting, what were thought to be the best articles, pictures and synopses. It took years and quite a few bob to replenish the collection.

Just flip to any page at random, David Dimbleby tripping the light fantastic on a cruise ship with devotees of ballroom dancing, Jimmy Young and his most dedicated fans including Dame Barbara Cartland; Faye Dunaway's latest play; Telly Savalas jumping into the league of big-city crimebusters and Philip Jenkinson's wry little film column, in which he would gently remind us, among other witticisms, that Assault on the Wayne was not an attack on big John.

The letters page, with admonishments from disgruntled viewers include a missive from a Ms Richmond who complains that a 1974 episode of The Brothers was spoiled because of an all too detailed synopsis, Ms Spear of Oxford who mentions the split infinitives of Star Trek's Captain Kirk and complaints of "men hogging the air waves" from an unashamedly liberated Julie, aged 15, from Chelmsford.

The advertisements of the time were a step back to a more innocent and economic age: A winter cruise to the Canaries in 1973 would set you back £116; shoes with real leather uppers were priced between £7.95 and £10.25; if your taste in music was eclectic, from James Last to Status Quo, choose your favourite records or cassettes for 39 pence from ACB (Audio Club of Britain) for a 10-day approval period; and very handy as standby presents, who could forget EMI record tokens?

It is also difficult to believe that many people rented TVs. I recall Mum regularly visiting Radio Rentals or Battle's equivalent to pay for a grainy pictured black and white unit, that frequently broke down and was the centre of our entertainment from around 1968 until at least the end of the 1970s. Denis Norden, in a glossy Radio Times advert from 1974 enthusiastically attempts to convince readers to rent a 22ins colour set from Rediffusion, for £1.46 per week – "If you can clear a path through the blokes at the window."

David Rudman,
Rockingham, Western Australia

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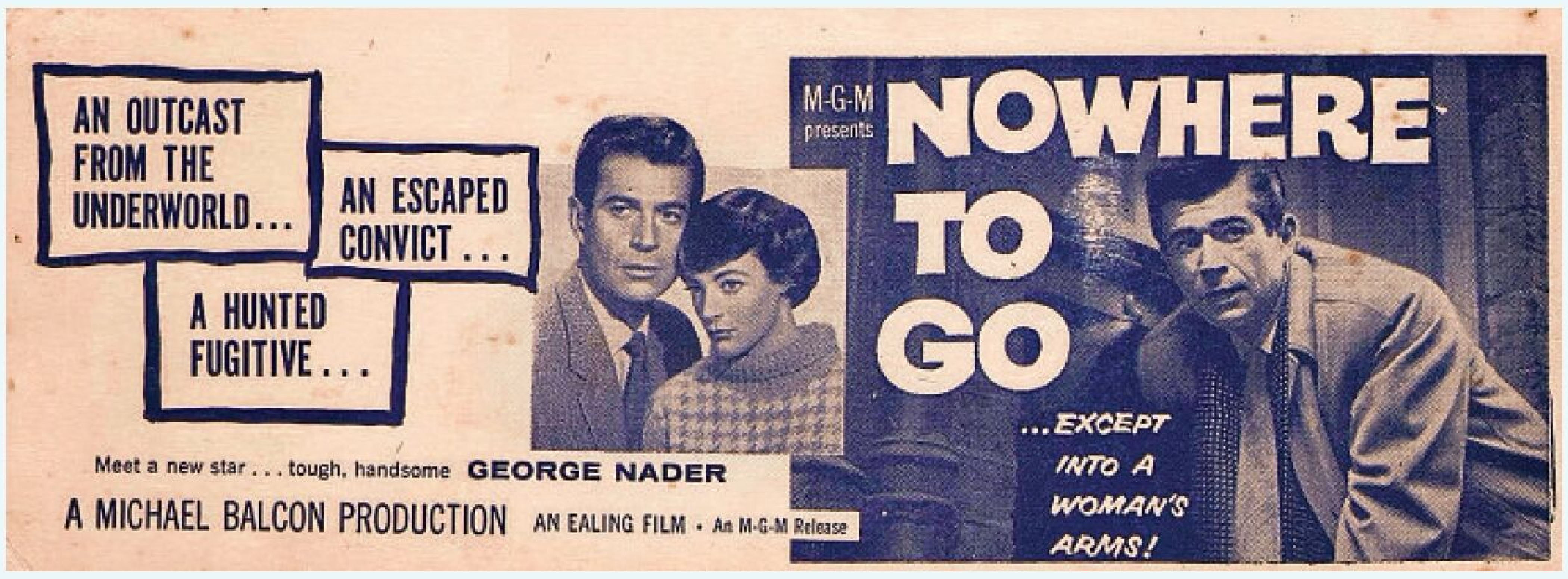
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The Spare Tyres (1967)
(Tuesday 4 February, 8.55am)
Comedy. Director: Michael J Lane. Starring: Terence Alexander, Judy Franklin, Pauline Yates, and Frank Finlay. Dennis attempts to get rid of two old tyres dumped in his garden.

Warn that Man (1943)
(Thursday 6 February, 11.25am)
Comedy Thriller. Director: Lawrence Huntington. Starring: Gordon Harker, Raymond Lovell and Finlay Currie. During World War Two, an actor takes part in a German attempt to kidnap Winston Churchill.

Laxdale Hall (1952)
(Friday 7 February, 1.40pm)
Comedy. Director: John Eldridge. Starring: Ronald Squire, Fulton Mackay and Prunella Scales. Car owners from a remote Scottish village refuse to pay road funds until a proper road has been built.

The Hostages (1975)
(Saturday 8 February, 10am)
Family. Director: David Eady. Starring: Stephen Garlick, Ray Barrett and Robin Askwith. A group of children find themselves held hostage by two escaped convicts.

Nowhere To Go (1958)
(Saturday 8 February, 3.35pm)
Crime. Directors: Seth Holt and Basil Dearden. Starring: George Nader, Maggie Smith, Bernard Lee, Harry H Corbett and Bessie Love. A criminal escapes from jail and attempts to recover his stashed loot but is shunned by the criminal community and hunted by the police.

The Thirty Nine Steps (1978)
(Saturday 8 February, 9.05pm)
Crime. Director: Don Sharp. Starring: Robert Powell, David Warner, Karen Dotrice and John Mills. An engineer attempts to prevent Prussian agents from executing an assassination.

iPLAYER
bbc.co.uk/iplayer

Angelou on Burns
African American writer and poet Maya Angelou is welcomed to Ayrshire by a group of Burnsians who hold a party in her honour to celebrate Rabbie Burns' genius. Originally broadcast to commemorate the bicentenary of Burns' death in 1996, it is an evening where a shared passion for the Scottish bard creates a unique atmosphere.

Face to Face: Ken Dodd
In this rare television interview from 1995, comedian Ken Dodd talks to Jeremy Isaacs about his career and unique approach to comedy, sharing stories of his humble beginnings in 1930s Liverpool, his big break in 1965 at the London Palladium and his performance to the royal household at Windsor Castle.

The Singing Detective

The Singing Detective
Dennis Potter's classic drama serial with music, about a pulp thriller writer whose memories, 1930s-style gumshoe fiction and debilitating skin disease weave him an altered reality.

itvX
itv.com

UFO
Intergalactic live-action thriller from the creators of Thunderbirds.

Widows
When their villain husbands are killed during the attempted robbery of a security van, three widows have a chance to start afresh. Then one of them finds the robbery plans and they decide to finish what their husbands started.

The Royal
The highs and lows of life at a busy Yorkshire cottage hospital in the 1960s.

Photograph: (Singing Detective) BBC

LEGEND

FREEVIEW 41, SKY 148, FREESAT 137, VIRGIN 149

Quatermass and the Pit (1967)
(Saturday 1 February, 7pm)
Hammer version of the popular TV series. When prehistoric skulls and the remains of an alien spaceship are discovered in the bowels of London's Underground during an excavation, a weird and powerful force is unleashed. Professor Quatermass (Andrew Keir) is called in to investigate.

Split Second (1992)
(Friday 7 February, 10.55pm)
In a futuristic London where rising sea levels have placed large areas of the city under water. A burned-out cop (Rutger Hauer) is assigned to investigate a series of bizarre murders which point to a non-human killer.

The Day of the Jackal (1973)
(Sunday 16 February, 9pm)
With French police on his trail, a mysterious English assassin attempts to kill President de Gaulle in this gripping adaptation of Frederick Forsyth's thriller.

Split Second

Death Line
(Thursday 20 February, 3.05am)
When a politician goes missing on the Underground, the subsequent police investigation uncovers a terrifying secret kept hidden since the 1800s. Who or what is turning the Underground tunnels into a death line?

U&GOLD

SKY 110, VIRGIN 124, TALKTALK 310, NOW TV

Blackadder II
(Thursday 6 February, 9.20pm)
Beer There are problems in the Blackadder household due to an embarrassing incident with a turnip, an ostrich feather and a puritanical, fat aunt.

Black Ops
(Saturday 8 February, 11.10pm)
Dom and Kay, two ordinary PCSOs, are recruited by Detective Inspector Clinton Blair to go undercover and infiltrate the infamous Brightmarsh Gang.

Catherine Cookson: The Man Who Cried

U&DRAMA

FREEVIEW/YOUVIEW/BT/ TALKTALK 20, SKY 143, VIRGIN 130, FREESAT 158

All Creatures Great and Small
(Friday 7 February, 4.25pm)
Pig in the Middle It's time for squabbling among the three Yorkshire vets when they want an evening out but find their diaries clashing.

Catherine Cookson: The Man Who Cried
(Sunday 9 February, 2.40pm)
Feature-length historical drama, adapted from the best-selling novel. Summer 1932, Abel Mason's wife exposes his affair with a married woman with tragic consequences.

U&YESTERDAY

FREEVIEW/YOUVIEW/BT/ TALKTALK 27, SKY 155, VIRGIN 129, FREESAT 159

How Britain Worked
(Saturday 1 February, 2pm)
Engineering enthusiast Guy Martin recreates technical achievements of the 19th century and overhauls a steam locomotive currently in use on the Severn Valley Railway.

Antiques Roadshow
(Tuesday 11 February, 1pm)
Black Country Living Museum The team visits the open-air museum in Dudley, where Geoffrey Munn examines a Fabergé jewel, commissioned by the Countess of Dudley in 1903.

Watch Dave, U&W, U&Yesterday and U&Drama shows on demand with U (u.co.uk) and catch up on your favourite programmes.

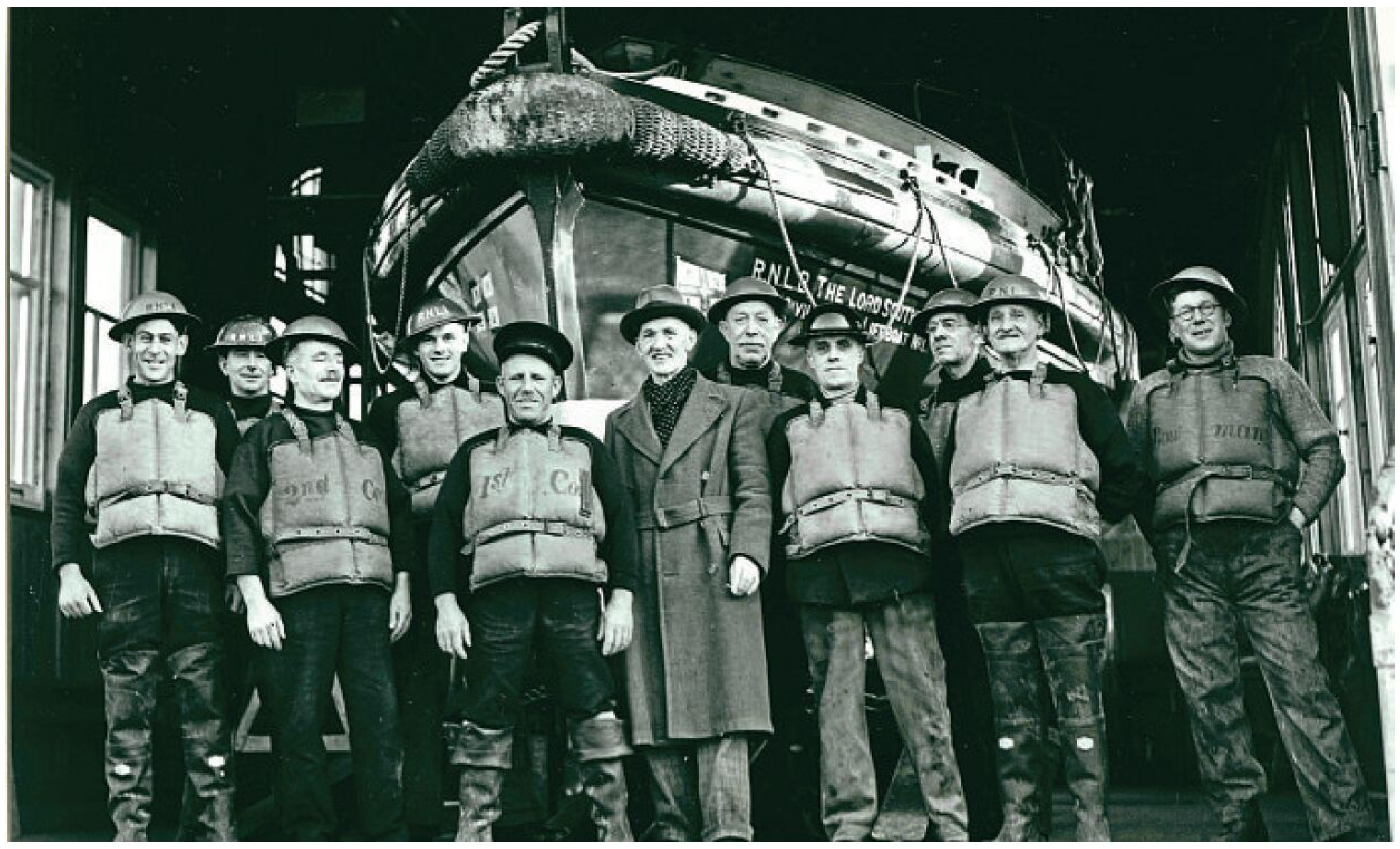
Channels may be unavailable in certain regions. If you are having trouble viewing channels, go to freeview.co.uk/freeview-channel-checker or call the Freeview Advice Line on 03456 50 50 50 (Mondays to Fridays, 9am-5pm).

BRITAIN NOW

TOPICAL SNIPPETS FROM AROUND THE NATION

The War and Water

Stories of courage from World War Two are being brought to life thanks to a grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund. The RNLI has been awarded £131,122 to research and share the stories to mark the 80th anniversary of the war ending. Called RNLI 1939-45: Stories of Courage, the project will help the RNLI to uncover and share stories that might otherwise be lost. The organisation is working with crew, volunteers, supporters and partners to seek out the stories and experiences of volunteers and those rescued by the RNLI during the war. Over the course of the two-year project, the RNLI will deliver an exciting programme of events across the UK, including an exhibition at the Lighthouse Poole which will run from January 2026 and showcase wartime art and stories of its World War Two history.



The crew of Margate lifeboat the Lord Southborough, which rescued Pilot Officer Richard Hillary who parachuted into the sea after his Spitfire was shot down.

Early Doors

A Stoke-on-Trent museum celebrating the history and craft of pottery making has opened three months earlier than usual. Gladstone Pottery Museum (01782 237777, stokemuseums.org.uk/gpm), which is normally closed from November to March, reopened to the public in January as part of celebrations marking 100 years since Stoke-on-Trent was made a city. Also marking 50 years since it was officially opened as a museum, Gladstone Pottery Museum's extended season will offer a series of exciting events, including pottery workshops and exclusive connoisseur tours.

Councillor Jane Ashworth, leader of Stoke-on-Trent City Council, said: "Gladstone Pottery Museum is a real gem in our city's cultural heritage. It's a much-loved, award-winning visitor attraction and heritage site that welcomes around 3,000 visitors a month. If you've never been before, why not make the time in 2025 to come out and support our local attractions and see what's on offer."

Located in a Victorian pottery factory, Gladstone Pottery Museum offers a fascinating insight into the history of Stoke-on-Trent.

Whistle Blowers

Locomotives at heritage railways across the UK and overseas sounded their whistles to mark the start of Railway 200, a year celebrating the bicentenary of the modern railway. The "whistle-up" saw approximately 200 steam locomotives sound their whistles for one minute from midday on New Year's Day. Among them were the Great Western Railway-designed No 7820 Dinmore Manor and the recently-overhauled No 3850, which shattered the peace at the Gloucestershire Warwickshire Steam Railway's (01242 621405, gwsr.com) Broadway and Cheltenham Racecourse stations respectively.

In the 200th anniversary year of the Stockton & Darlington Railway – the world's first commercially successful passenger and goods-carrying railway – heritage railways, museums and community organisations are holding a wide variety of activities to celebrate rail's remarkable past, its role today, and its importance to a sustainable future. Further information including events, the history of rail and how to get involved in the rail industry can be found at railway200.co.uk

Great Western Railway-designed locomotive No 7820 Dinmore Manor took part in a "whistle-up" to mark the start of Railway 200, which celebrates the bicentenary of the modern railway.

Photographs: (GWSR) Ian Crowder, (NT) National Trust Images/Megan Taylor, (Pottery Museum) Creative Commons/Andrew Stawarz, (Terry Pratchett) Rob Wilkins

A Colourful Past

New insights into the colourful world of the past are being revealed at a new National Trust facility. Funded by the UKRI Arts and Humanities Research Council, the National Trust is creating a new laboratory to research paint samples gathered from across its properties to see what the many hidden layers of paint can unlock about the past use of colour and how they can be recreated.

The trust's collection of paint samples, dating from the second century AD to the present day, covers many thousands of examples gathered across the country over many decades and includes samples from paintings, buildings and decorative arts as well as interiors of historic buildings and even exterior woodwork, fences and gates. The cataloguing of the collection at the new laboratory at the National Trust's Royal Oak Foundation Conservation Centre at Knole near Sevenoaks, will open up access and allow researchers to make use of the vast collection of paint samples from National Trust properties for the first time.

The new laboratory near Sevenoaks, Kent allows National Trust scientists to research the composition of paint samples from its properties, paintings and other objects.

In a recent example, an 1881 watercolour painted by William Jackson Browne, the owner of Townend (01539 432628, nationaltrust.org.uk/townend), a historic farmhouse in Cumbria, showed a different paint colour for the building's woodwork. The house timbers had been painted a very dark green for many decades. But after paint sampling confirmed that a dark red shown in the painting was historically correct, the house has now been restored to its original colour scheme.

John Orna-Ornstein, the National Trust's director of curation and experience said: "Through this project we will be able to learn about the choices behind colours of the past and where those colours came from, using forensic approaches which will greatly improve our understanding of these special historic places.

"Our collection of paint samples are thousands of tiny cultural assets currently hidden from view, but which we can now make accessible. From some of the earliest decorative schemes in frescoes at Chedworth Roman Villa to 18th century carriages and works by Constable our staff and facilities will have a huge impact on increasing knowledge, understanding and curiosity."

BEST OF BRITISH
PAST AND PRESENT

NEXT MONTH

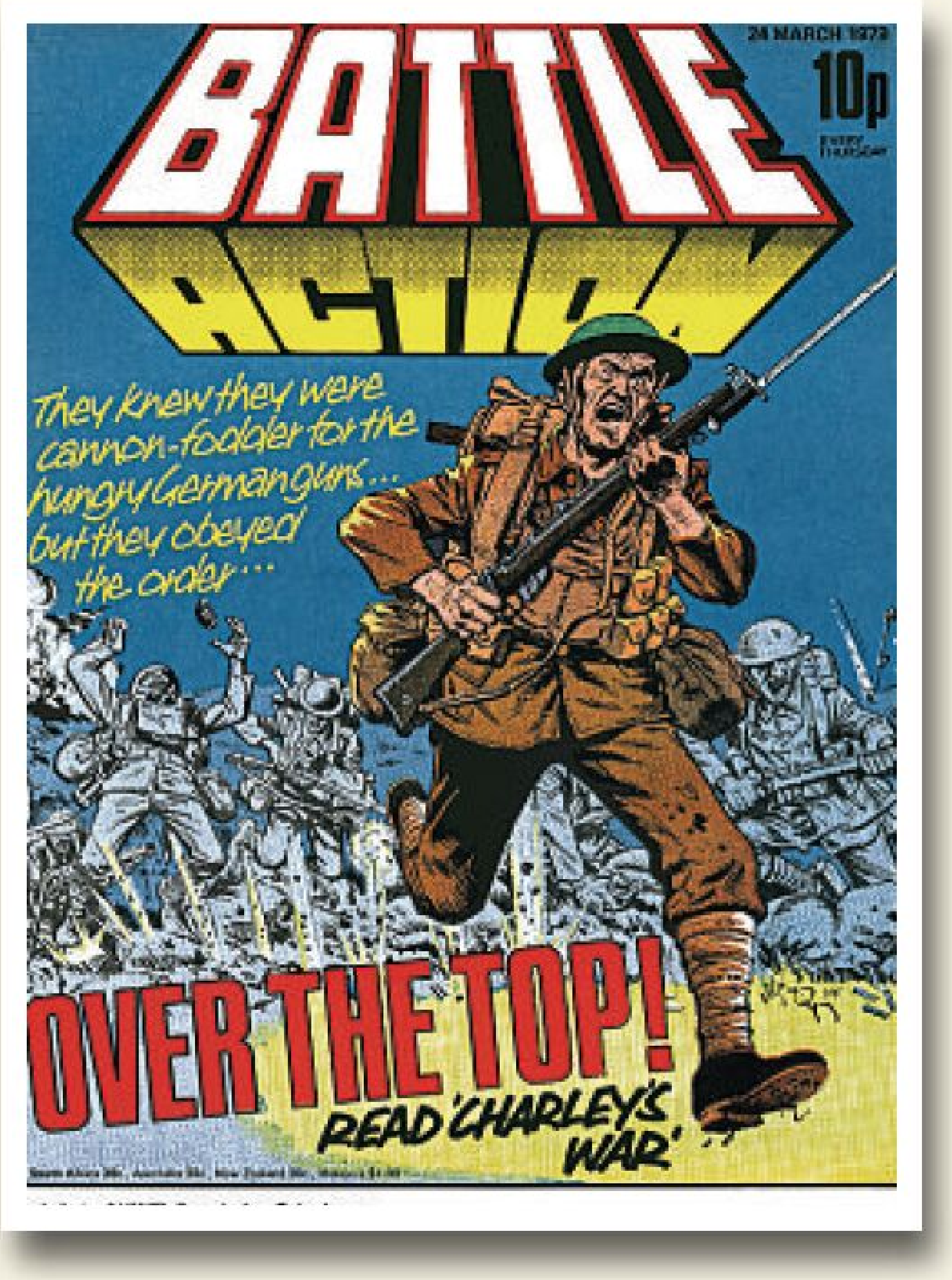
In the March Issue of Best of British

Think of a Question
We talk to Johnny Ball

Battling On
Fifty years of Battle Picture Weekly

The Colour of Magic
Remembering Sir Terry Pratchett

By Royal Appointment
The history of royal warrants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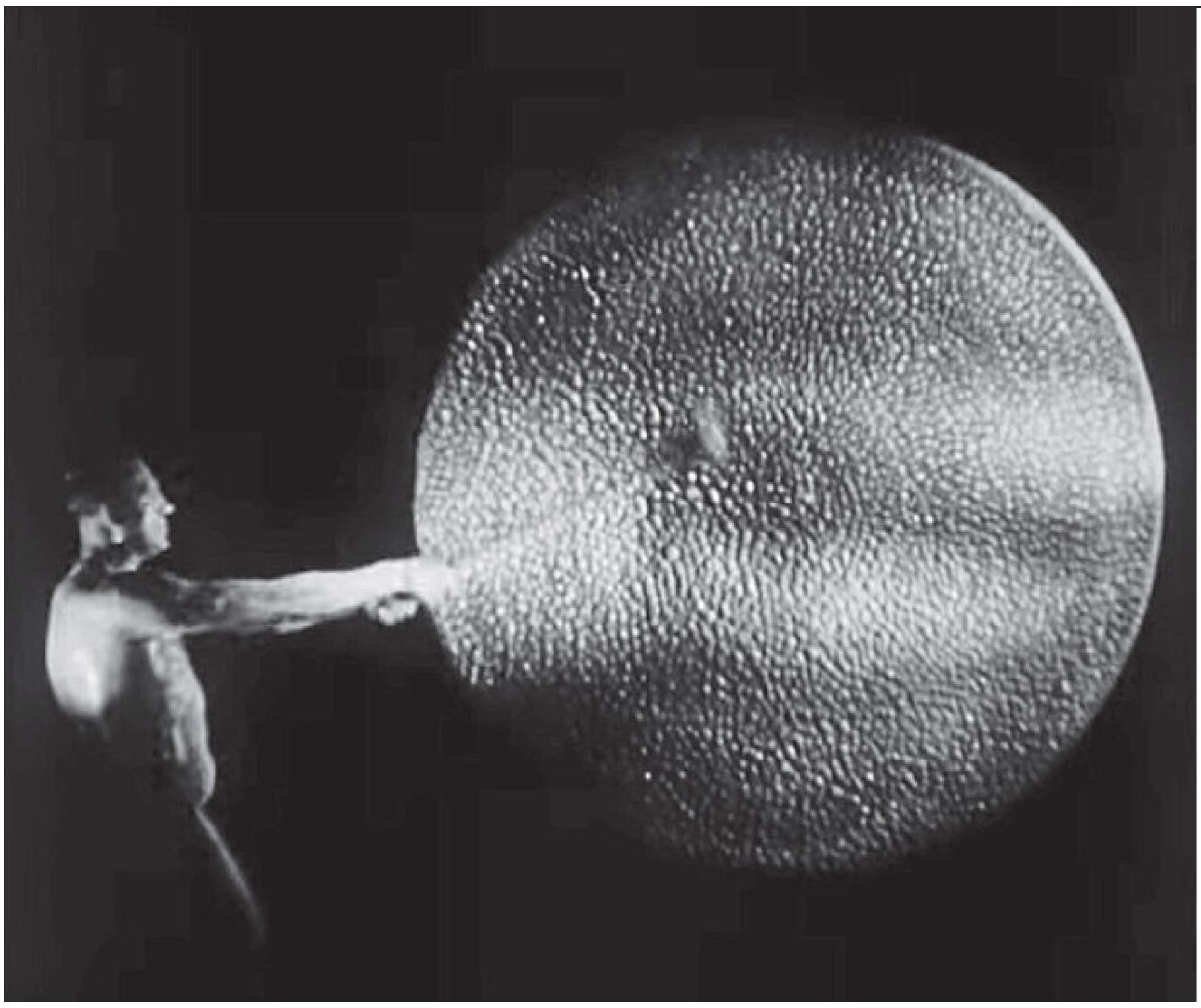

The Gongman

John Phillpott remembers the unsung movie star who was the main attraction down at his local

If you had popped into Rugby's London House pub for a lunchtime drink back in the late 1960s, the chances are that you would have come into contact with Carl Dane. You just couldn't miss this giant of a man.

Standing at 6ft 6ins tall, dressed in a beige gabardine mac, he would invariably be found standing at the bar, regaling customers with his exploits.

In those days, the Chapel Street public house was run by Tom Rotherham and his wife Mary. They always gave Carl a warm welcome, not least because he could down a pint of beer in seconds, and then immediately request a refill.

And there were certainly a lot of those… very good for business indeed.

But despite an awesome capacity for ale, Carl was never drunk. Instead, he alternately entertained and amused the punters with tricks he had undoubtedly learnt as a circus strongman. And yes, he was very strong. On meeting him, I shook his hand… and what a grip. I thought my finger bones were about to crumble.

But there again, his strength was legendary. I once witnessed him crush a cooking apple to pulp with one hand, and on another occasion saw him hammer a six-inch nail into a block of wood with his clenched fist, using only a handkerchief as protection.

But this must have been small beer for Carl, for here was a man who once hauled a double-decker bus down Oxford Street, London, using his teeth.

Nevertheless, this was only one side of Carl Dane, because he enjoyed another rather special claim to fame. And that was as the first gong man to work for J Arthur Rank, the legendary movie organisation.

The trademark of a muscle-bound man banging a gong at the beginning of every Rank film was dreamed up in the 1930s by General Film Distributors, which then handled Rank's films.

There can be very few people down the decades who haven't seen a Rank movie and perhaps wondered about the identity of the man banging the gong.

And I can also let you into another secret. That famous gong was made from plaster and paper – and all the striking in the world wouldn't have produced even the tiniest tinkle.

The noise that we hear is actually the reverberations of a Chinese tam-tam – an instrument measuring just 3ft in diameter – recorded by percussionist James Blades.

Down the years, there has been a succession of gong men. One was "Bombardier" Billy Wells, British heavyweight boxing champion from 1911-19.

Carl Dane lived in a caravan for much of his later life. He died in 1981, and is buried at St Margaret of Antioch Church, Crick, Northamptonshire.

But as far as I'm concerned, his memory will never fade. For occasionally, perhaps on a rainy Sunday afternoon, I will start watching an old black and white movie. I will wonder whether the man banging the gong at the beginning of the film is Carl Dane, the man who used to prop up the bar in the London House and entertain the punters all those years ago.

And maybe then I will remember that unforgettable bone bruising handshake and mentally wind the tape back to recall those far-off days of yesteryear when amazing characters such as Carl Dane walked the streets of Rugby.

Go and Make the Tea, Boy!, John Phillpott's memoir of his days on the Rugby Advertiser in the 1960s, is available from Amazon.

Top Left: Circus strongman Carl Dane was the original Gongman, the mascot of General Film Distributors, which was later adopted by the wider Rank Organisation. Top Right: Carl Dane, pictured in the 1960s when John knew him.

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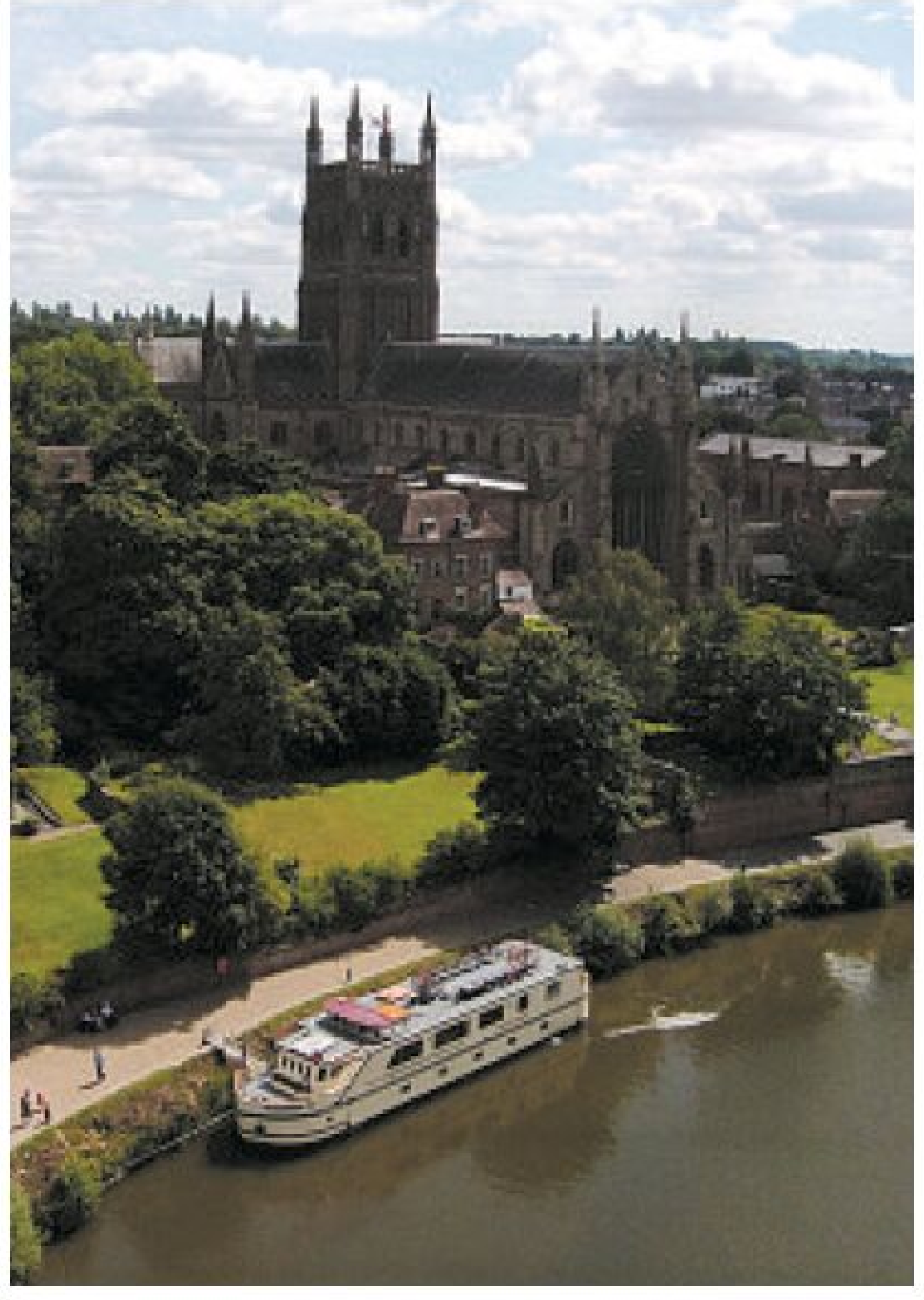

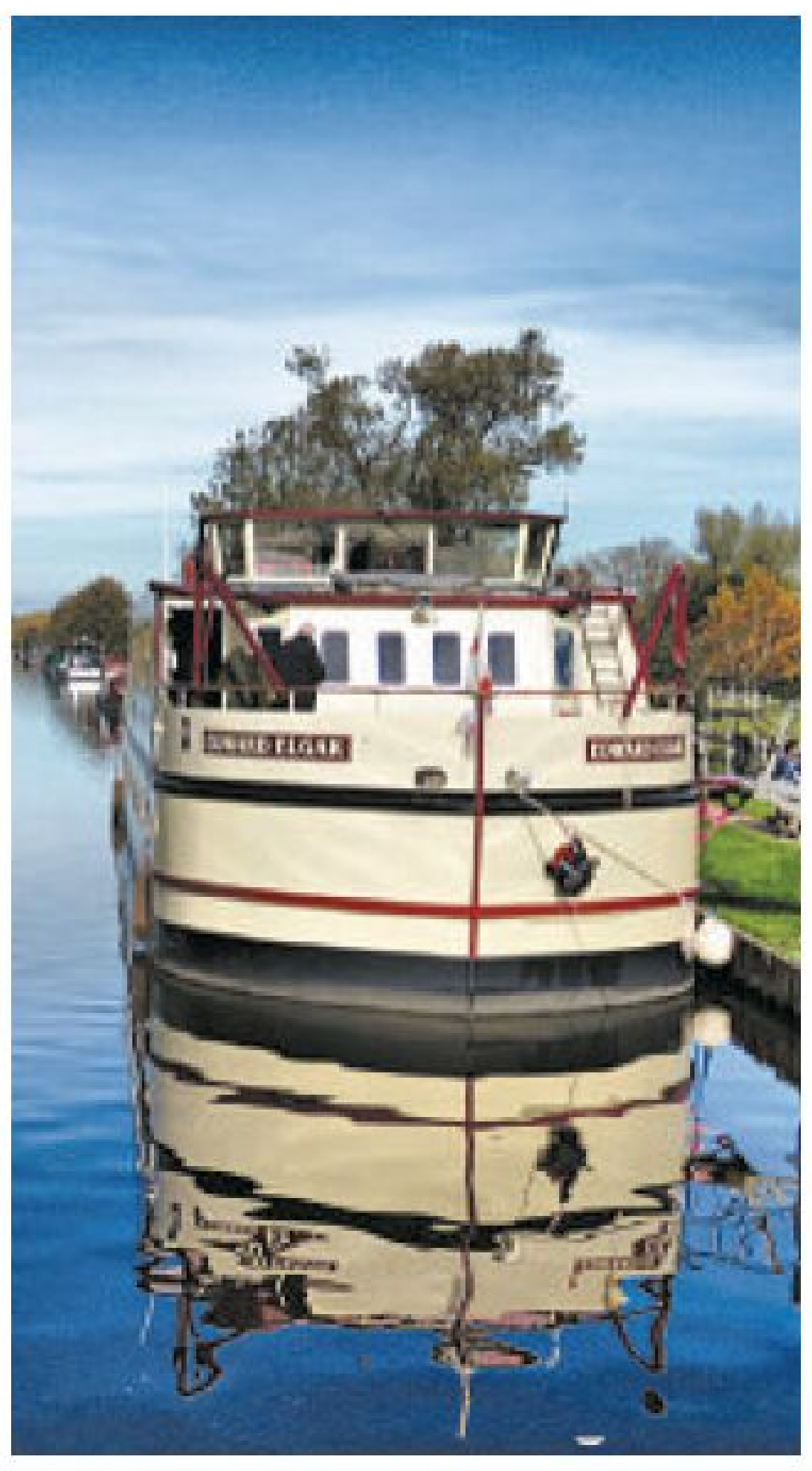

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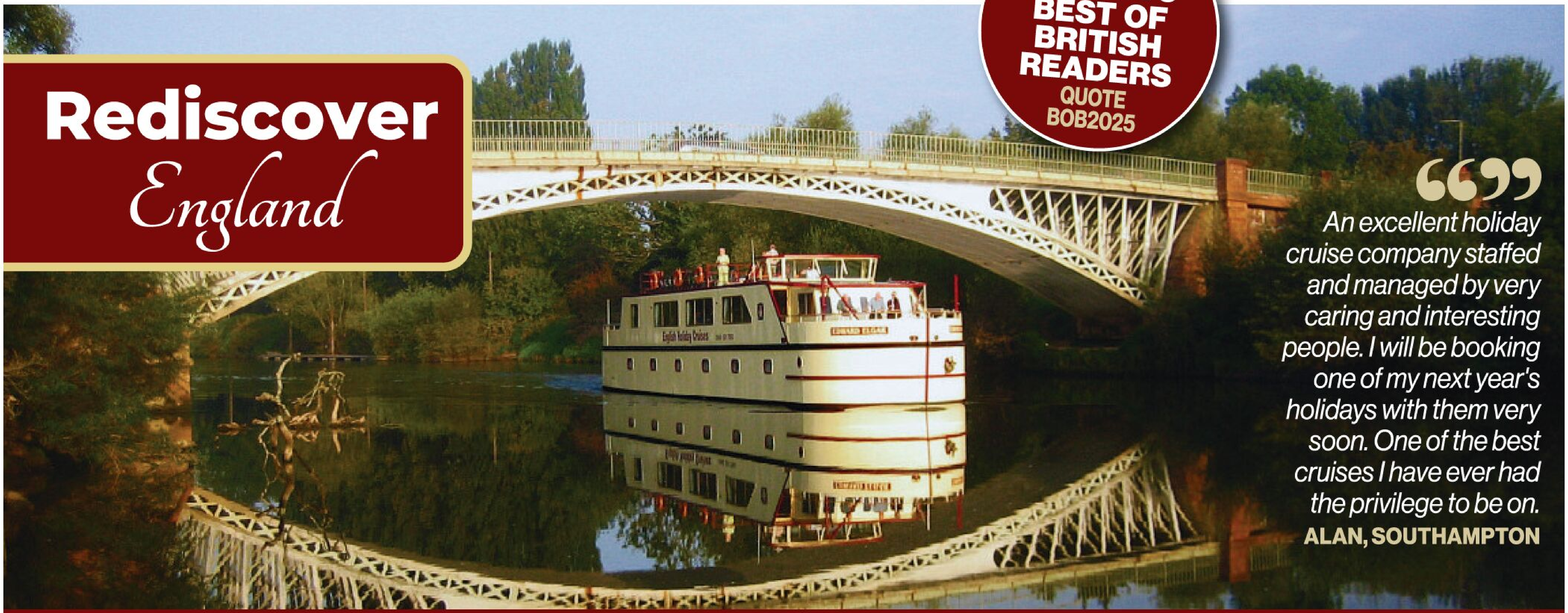

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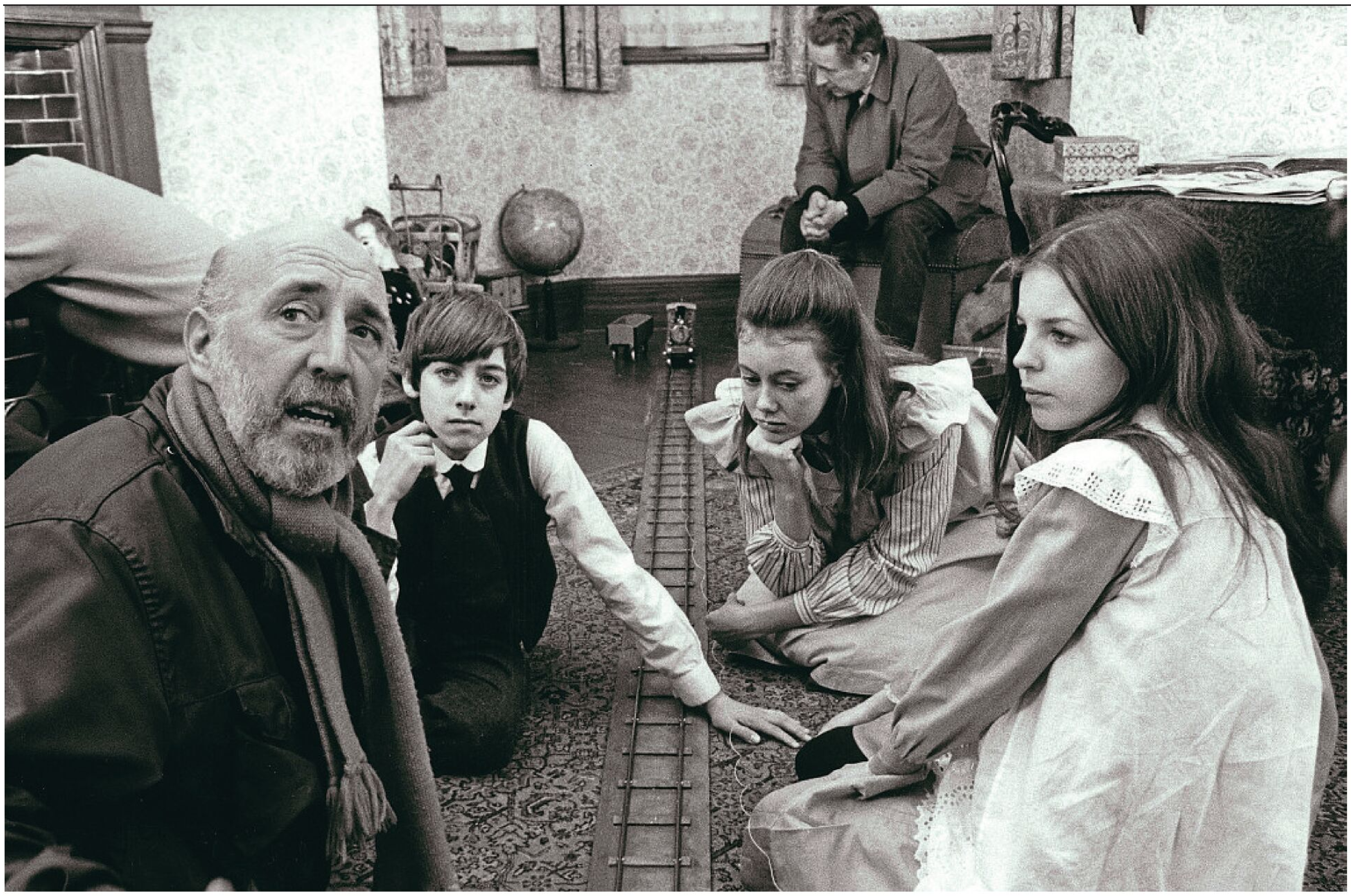


The Railway Child

Peter Robertson chats to former actor Gary Warren

In the 1960s and 70s, Gary Warren was one of Britain's most successful child actors before disappearing from the spotlight. The talented youngster, who was one of The Railway Children in that family favourite film and featured in the classic children's series Catweazle as well as the ITV sitcom Alexander the Greatest, has barely been seen since 1977.

"After that I pulled a disappearing act and became a regular bloke for the most part," he explains. "The transition from child/youth actor through to adult is notoriously difficult. Some have succeeded, some spectacularly so. Some have stumbled along. And sadly, some have fallen.

"I chose to take a break, which I'm still on. I've been the subject of many Where Are They Now? articles. Well, I have led an exquisitely wonderful life. I have been married to my absolute soulmate for over 40 years and have two amazing and extremely talented kids, a brilliant son-in-law and a fab little granddaughter who is bright and gorgeous. So, it's all good."

Now a 70-year-old US-based grandfather, Gary has made a surprise return as a writer, with a debut novel entitled 1961 Greenwich Village: A Fable, and his autobiography, If My Memoir Serves Me Well. "My musings on those magical years of the 1960s and 1970s, I believe, might be of some interest. I'm sure The Railway Children, in particular, holds massive fascination, being one of the most beloved British films of, dare I say, all time. Considering it was the directorial debut of Lionel Jeffries who was up until then an actor, it is indeed a remarkable achievement."

Gary was born in Neasden, north-west London on 5 July 1954, an only child. "My dad, Michael Warren, was a furrier. My mum, Adele Appleton, was a dancer in the 1930s with a troupe called Terry's Juveniles. She had aspirations and then the war came, and she gave up in her 20s when she got married and became a housewife and mother to me."

At the age of five, Gary first performed publicly on a family holiday in Southend-on-Sea, Essex. "I sang Volare in a contest on the bandstand and came second. When I was seven, I got my first professional job – a part in a film called Silent Playground. At 10, I recorded a festive single, I Saw Mummy Kissing Santa Claus, but was too young for it to be released.

"My mum was keen on me performing and, although she could be considered a stage mother, I thoroughly enjoyed it. I've always loved singing, and acting I found fascinating. And, of course, it took me out of school, which was great!"

After two years at grammar school, Gary went to Aida Foster Theatre School

Top: Lionel Jeffries directs The Railway Children's Gary Warren, Jenny Agutter and Sally Thomsett.

Photographs: (Catweazle/The Railway Children) Shutterstock

Left: Gary and his wife, Laura, moved from Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire to upstate New York to be nearer their children, Jake, and Georgia. Right: Pictured with Geoffrey Bayldon, Gary played Cedric "Owl Face" Collingford in the second series of Catweazle.

from 13 to 15. "I wasn't spoilt, precious or big-headed, and I was quite mature for my age. I was chaperoned a lot by my mum, but also Aida Foster had their own women chaperones. No one ever took advantage of me."

From 12, Gary featured in the 13-part series Disney Wonderland and featured in BBC plays. And, in 1969, he appeared with the legendary dancer and actress Ginger Rogers in the musical Mame in London's West End. Gary wasn't starstruck by the big names he encountered. "They're all normal people. When you're on a film set it's very workmanlike. I guess some are theatrical and show-offs but most I worked with I'd say: 'Hello, how are you? What did you have for dinner last night?' It's as mundane as that."

Established stars in The Railway Children included Iain Cuthbertson, Bernard Cribbins, and Dinah Sheridan. The young siblings were Jenny Agutter, then 17, as Bobbie, 15; Sally Thomsett, 20, as Phyllis, 11; and Gary, 15, as Peter, 10. "In the E Nesbit book it was based on, Bobbie was the oldest, then Peter, then Phyllis. But Sally is older than Jenny, and as I looked younger and smaller than Sally, they made Peter the youngest."

Following the release of The Railway Children in 1970, Gary featured in the hit children's television series Catweazle, London Weekend Television's children's fantasy about a time-travelling wizard. In the second of its two series, Gary played Cedric Collingford AKA Owl Face. "Catweazle was such an iconic TV show that there's still a big fan club for it. They occasionally email me questions about it. In 2011, I attended a Catweazle convention at the house in Hertfordshire where series two was filmed, and that was great fun."

Gary describes his young self as "a child actor". When I call him a "child star", he says: "I wouldn't go that far. I never thought I'd be a movie star. The one TV series I did that could potentially have become massive was Alexander the Greatest," he adds of the 1971-72 ATV sitcom in which he starred as Alexander Green. "I was perfect casting for that – like me, he was 16, Jewish, the son of a furrier, and supported Queens Park Rangers. It was written well but wasn't directed very well, and it wasn't very funny. It just didn't work. The cast wasn't strong."

Gary reveals he turned down a minor role in the multi-Oscar-winning film musical Oliver! from 1968. Both that film's young stars, Mark Lester and Jack Wild, famously went off the rails for a while, but Gary insists he never did. "No, absolutely not. The first car I bought was a Triumph Toledo – you can't get more sedate than that in 1971."

There was a Gary Warren fan club for a while. But a single Gary recorded at 17, Lucky Guy, failed to chart. Home during his heyday was "a bog-standard three-bedroom semi in Neasden". His last screen acting appearance was in the BBC play Sea Tales in 1977. "After that, nothing. Jenny Agutter parlayed it into a longstanding career and some of us didn't. Even Sally Thomsett was struggling. She didn't really do anything much after Man About the House," he says of the Thames Television sitcom that ran from 1973 to 1976.

So, what did Gary go on to do? "I wanted to just live a normal life. I had fun driving around Europe in a campervan with a friend. I've always loved America, it's a magical place, and in 1979 I moved to Los Angeles to gain 'life experience'. In 1980, I went to the opening of Flippers roller-disco on Santa Monica Boulevard, which coincidentally Jenny also attended, so many hugs ensued.

"I met my wife, Laura, in LA in 1982. We were Brits together out there, and absolutely hit it off. We returned to the UK in 1984 and got married. Laura and I had a clothing retail business for many years. It was great, very successful financially, but it wasn't glamorous or exciting – I didn't go to premieres and stuff like that, it was very low-key. We closed the business about 10 years ago. It was not sold on. That's basically it. I've led a normal life, and we've been very happy."

Six years ago, they moved from Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire to upstate New York to be nearer their musician son, Jake, 37, and journalist daughter, Georgia, 38. “She’s a mum and works as a journalist for the American side of the Guardian Online. I was neither keen or not keen on them entering the entertainment business – they could, and do, make their own choices.”

At Gary and Laura’s “compact” home, there is no evidence of his illustrious past, except a scrapbook his late mother kept for him. “The scrapbook came over to America with me. My kids show no interest in it because kids are not interested in the machinations of their parents. I’m sure even Bruce Springsteen’s kids are not interested in listening to his old albums.”

A new television adaptation of The Railway Children was aired in 2000, and a sequel titled The Railway Children Return in 2022. Both starred Jenny Agutter, but neither Sally nor Gary were invited. Of his screen siblings, Gary says: “Jenny and I email each other regularly, writing ‘Hi sis’ and ‘Hi bro’. We get on very well and chatting to her is like the years have evaporated. I last saw her in 2014 when Bernard Cribbins received the JM Barrie Award at the BBC, but sadly Sally pulled out of that.

“I haven’t seen Sally since the early 90s when we went to a sort of reunion at the Bluebell Railway in Sussex, but Jenny couldn’t make that. So, the three of us haven’t been all together since Lionel Jeffries’ This Is Your Life in the late 1970s. There’ll always be a bond between us as we went through something special.”

Gary has long borne a resemblance to his all-time favourite actor Dustin Hoffman but says he himself is no longer a working actor despite doing voiceover work in the last two years. And when an author-publisher friend persuaded him to write his memoirs, Gary enjoyed that so much he penned a novel, too, and is planning a second.

A regular gym-goer and tennis player, Gary remains fit for his age. “I’ve always had a youthful outlook and cannot believe I am now 70. The older I’ve got the less I’ve got recognised, but everyone knows The Railway Children. It’s part of everyone’s past, an iconic film that has lasted forever.”

If My Memoir Serves Me Well by Gary Warren is available on Kindle and the self-read Audible audiobook.

THE AMAZING Mr JEFFRIES

Patricia M Jenkins remembers actor turned director Lionel Jeffries

In a showbusiness career spanning more than 60 years, Lionel Jeffries delighted audiences with his comic portrayals of authority figures in classic films and television shows during the 1950s and 1960s. During the 1970s, he turned his hand to directing with his charming Edwardian adaption of E Nesbit’s novel The Railway Children. Indeed, Jeffries himself had much of the Edwardian papa about him. He was born into a Salvation Army family in Forest Hill, London on 10 June 1926. His schooling, however, took place in Dorset. He returned there in his twilight years.

During World War Two, he saw active service with the Oxford and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry in Burma where the jungle heat made him prematurely bald. Later, he joined the Royal African Frontier Force, ending his army career with the rank of captain. On return to civilian life, he studied acting at Rada, winning the prestigious Kendal Prize awarded to the most promising actor of the year.

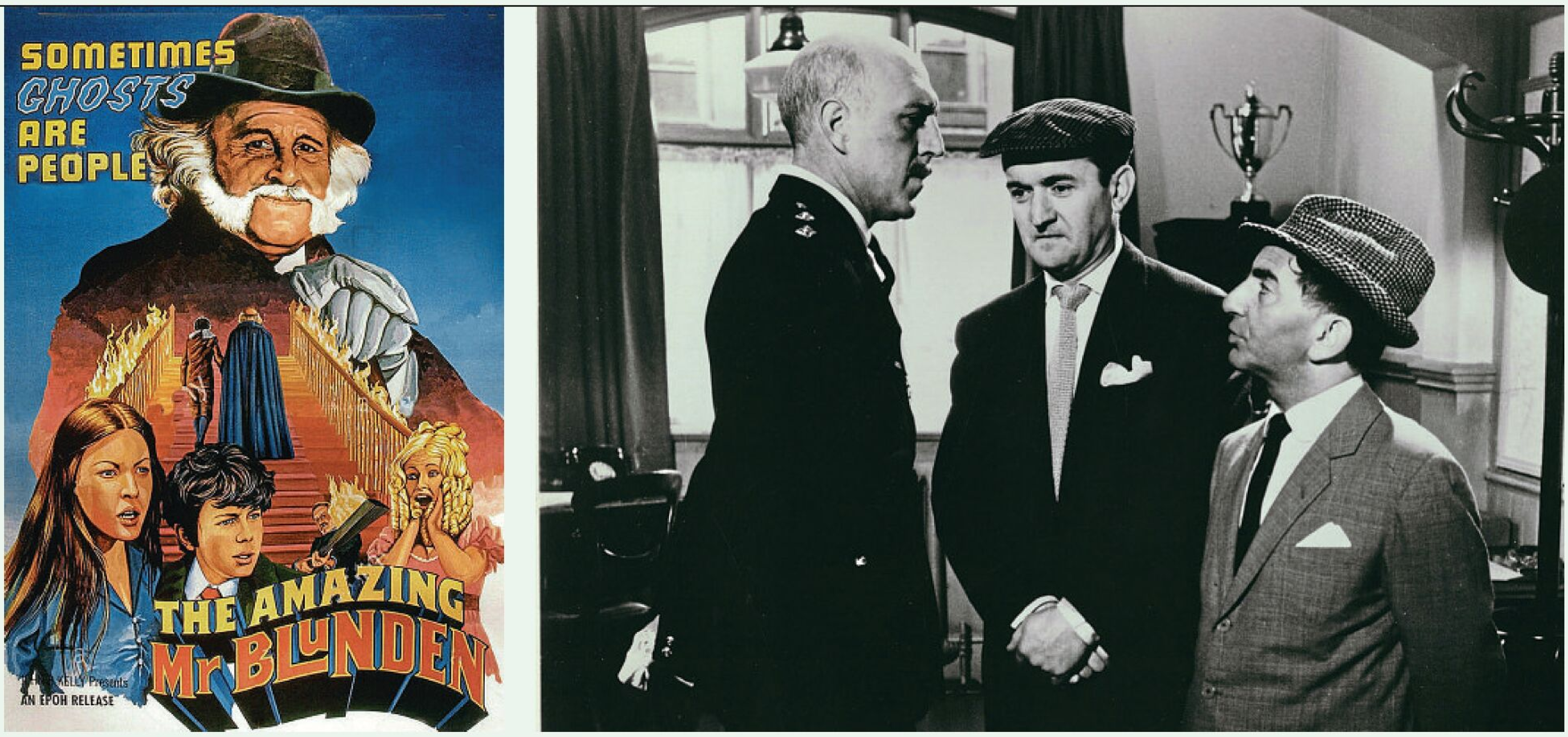
In 1949, Jeffries made his stage debut at the Westminster Theatre in the military drama Carrington VC. His talents were soon spotted, and he moved into the more commercially lucrative worlds of film and television. With his military bearing, parade-ground voice, and handlebar moustache, he looked every inch the regimental sergeant major. These features were put to excellent use in the 1957 film Bhowani Junction, an adaption of John Masters’ novel about Indian independence. Directed by George Cukor and starring Ava Gardner and Stewart Granger, Jeffries gave them sterling support as an Indian army officer.

There followed humorous portrayals of authority figures in comedy classics: Dr Hatchet in Doctor at Large (1957), Chief Prison Officer “Sour” Crout in Two-Way Stretch (1960) and later in 1963 as Inspector Fred “Nosey” Parker in The Wrong Arm of the Law. His unique mix of comic formality and anxiety was guaranteed to generate laughter.

The 1960s saw him broaden his range with serious roles. In 1960, he starred in his most daring film, The Trials of Oscar Wilde. The narrative centred on the rivalry between the Irish playwright and the much-maligned Marquess of Queensbury for the affection of Queensberry’s son Lord

Top: Lionel Jeffries as shop assistant Arthur Lee, who finds £2,000 on top of a bus in the 1955 comedy film Windfall.

Photographs: (Windfall) ITV/Shutterstock



Left: Directed by Lionel Jeffries, The Amazing Mr Blunden is his darkest film and "his true masterpiece". Right: Excelling as authority figures, Jeffries – pictured here with Graham Stark and Davy Kaye – played Inspector Fred "Nosy" Parker in The Wrong Arm of the Law.

Alfred Douglas. In Jeffries' sympathetic portrayal, Queensberry – an aristocrat usually perceived as the villain – emerges a desperate man driven to despair over the death of his eldest son; a caring if overbearing father who wants to protect his surviving son from scandal and social ruin.

In 1963, Jeffries teamed up with Hammer Film Productions for civil war epic The Scarlet Blade. Here, playing a roundhead colonel, he efficiently dispatched the film's star Oliver Reed. Five years later, Jeffries played the role audiences most associate him with – the eccentric inventor Grandpa Potts in the family musical Chitty Chitty Bang Bang.

Like Grandpa Potts, Jeffries was a devoted family man, married to Eileen for 48 years and father to three children. Like many of his generation, he strongly disapproved of the permissiveness that infected film and television from the mid-1960s onwards and his work both as an actor and director was firmly family orientated. None more so than the films he directed during the 1970s starting with The Railway Children.

From its opening sequence with the children and the cook singing the music hall song The Man Who Broke the Bank at Monte Carlo – joyously foreshadowing the financial difficulties about to descend upon the family – to its tear-jerking climax of father and daughter reunited at the station, followed by the subdued final scene of the children walking away from the cottage, each frame is beautifully composed and all reveal Jeffries' deep understanding of the era.

Nostalgic without being sentimental, Jeffries' evocation of Edwardian England recalls a more genteel age of good manners, deference to elders, self-help and moral decency aligned to strong family values – a world away from the strife-torn Britain of the 1970s. Indeed, the film's very gentleness explains its later success thanks to repeat showings at Christmas and on bank holidays to remain a much-loved children's classic. And a family atmosphere prevailed on the set with Jeffries as the firm but fair paterfamilias.

Jenny Agutter who played Bobbie, the eldest child, was then aged 17. While filming she was banned from pubs. Despite this, she sneaked out to a nightclub with Sally Thomsett (who played her younger sister Phyllis) much to Jeffries' annoyance. Thomsett, who was 20 at the time, was banned by contract from revealing her real age. However, when the "children" acted well, Jeffries rewarded them with half a crown. He was sensitive to the emotional needs of his cast. He created a quiet place for them to prepare for a traumatic scene, such as the one with the landslide caused by explosives planted among the trees.

In 1972, Jeffries directed his darkest film and the one that most expresses his Christian worldview, "his true masterpiece" according to BBC film critic Mark Kermode – The Amazing Mr Blunden. An adaption of Antonia Barber's children's novel The Ghosts, it is a spooky story of guilt, greed, redemption, and child cruelty set in the aftermath of the Great War. Mrs Allen (Dorothy Alison), a widow, and her children, played by Lynne Frederick and Garry Miller, are relocated to a dilapidated country house by the mysterious solicitor Mr Blunden. There they encounter the ghosts of two regency children played by Rosalyn Landor and Marc Granger. The Allen children return to the past to rectify Blunden's error of judgement.

The film is full of Hammer Horror touches: wild woods, grotesque characters, and class distinctions, with James Villiers, fresh from the set of Asylum (1972), cast as an upper-class layabout, and a sinister child bride played by Madeline Smith – another gothic horror regular. Her greedy mother, Mrs Watkins, was played by Diana Dors in a role she relished. Landor remembered her as: "Warm and effusively welcoming. She loved us working with her." She became a motherly figure to them with Laurence Naismith (Mr Blunden) taking the role of a kindly uncle on set.

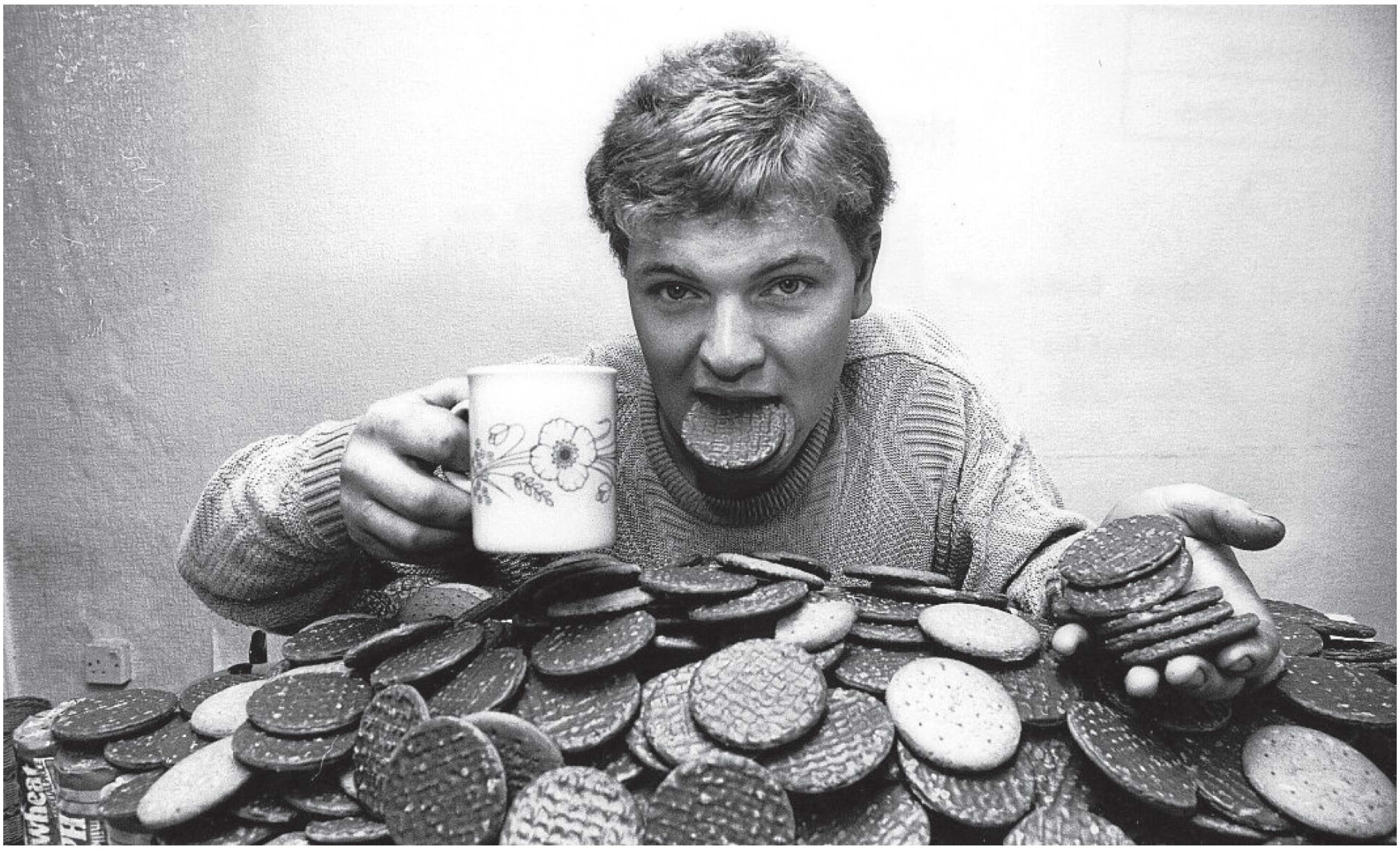
The film won awards for screenwriting and acting. Lynne Frederick won the Evening Standard Film Award for Best New Actress 1973. A potential sadly unfulfilled. However, this remains her most memorable role and a tribute to Jeffries' careful direction of actors.

Jeffries went on to direct Wombling Free (1977) and The Water Babies (1978), a charming mix of live action and animation. In his twilight years, he popped up in television comedies such as Father Charlie, and Minder. One memorable scene in Minder shows him speeding into the sunset on a motorcycle.

His final years were spent at Poole in Dorset where he died in February 2010. His son Ty Jeffries followed him into showbusiness on the cabaret circuit as Miss Hope Springs where he now spreads joy and laughter just as his father did. A worthy legacy indeed.

Taking the Biscuit

When it comes to the crunch, **Michael Montagu** knows all about biscuits



Biscuits are very much part of our everyday life, whether it's a fancy chocolate coated, creamy filled one, a digestive – both plain and chocolate – or a Rich Tea. They appear in just about every household. The late queen would have a few with her early morning tea, although I suspect that they were for the corgis, while in the household of her grandmother Queen Mary, they were received with varying degrees of anticipation. One of her ladies in waiting referred to Biscuits Saxe-Coburg as "just a handful of coagulated sand".

The biscuit has a long history, probably, in some form, right back to the Neolithic era, more than 4,000 years ago. Then, they were probably grain based, flat and crispy.

The word biscuit comes from the French bis-qui, which in turn is derived from the Roman *panis biscotus* – bread that has been baked twice. The Romans brought biscuits with them when they conquered England in 43AD. Their biscuits were more like rusks, meaning that they were very crisp and longer lasting than ordinary bread. This made them useful for taking on a journey, or, for soldiers, on campaigns.

Biscuits, more as we would know them, made an appearance from about the 14th century and were either savoury or sweet. Wafers were popular, made with a sweet batter and cooked over an open fire. Sweetening was, of course, done with honey. We did have sugar, as it arrived here from about the 11th century, brought back by the crusaders, but it was a very expensive, rare luxury, not coming into regular use until the 17th century.

Biscuits were originally quite functional, not just baked for pleasure. They were seen as an aid to digestion after a meal. We have only to remember the popular digestive biscuit, first made by two doctors in Scotland, in 1839. One of its ingredients, bicarbonate of soda, was often believed to have aided digestion by neutralising the natural acidity of the stomach.

Savoury biscuits continued to be popular, and in fact became an essential part of the diet of sailors on

Top: Chris Rolls, whose diet consisted of tea and chocolate digestives – Britain's favourite biscuit.

Photographs: (Biscuits) Shutterstock, (Banana bread) Creative Commons/Shisma

their long voyages. While fresh food was bought where possible in the foreign ports that they visited, no ship would set sail without two essential food items – salted meat and the ship's biscuit. These were extremely hard and long lasting. They were also practically inedible. To make them just took flour, water and salt, then they were baked for half an hour.

> **“The oldest surviving biscuit in the world dates back to 1784.”**

Their texture was so solid that they came to be known as hard tack. Not exactly a tasty comestible, they were useful for dunking into soups and stews, when they would soften and absorb whatever flavour was in the liquid. Their resilience sometimes meant that they were used as a sort of early postcard. Some have even survived; there is one in the National Maritime Museum at Greenwich. It has been almost engraved with the story that it was given to “Miss Blacket at Berwick on Tuesday 13 April 1784,” making it the oldest surviving biscuit in the world.

During the 17th century, three new drinks became popular in England – tea, coffee and hot chocolate. It became usual for a little something to be eaten with them, so the use of the biscuit as something other than a dessert accompaniment spread, eventually leading to the introduction of afternoon tea in the early 19th century. The first person credited with offering that favourite meal is Anna, Duchess of Bedford, who felt the need for a little something in the increasingly long time between luncheon and dinner.

By the 19th century, biscuits were being enjoyed in all but the very poorest households. The *petit four*, French for small oven, was a fancy biscuit, to be served as part of dessert in richer households. Intricately shaped, they were perfect for taking on a variety of tempting flavours. Queen Victoria, something of a gourmand, had her biscuits cooked at Windsor Castle, and then delivered to whichever residence she was staying in. Some of her favourites were, of course, Scottish shortbread, rice cakes, wafers and langues de chat. Shortbread is still a royal favourite, cooked to the original recipe, generally at Balmoral.

Late in the 19th century, the big names in commercial biscuit manufacture rose to prominence. These include Huntley and Palmers in Reading and Peak Freans, originally tea merchants, based in Bermondsey, south-east London. Popular biscuits appeared – the Garibaldi (known in our house as squashed fly biscuits because of the currants) in 1861, Rich Tea, originally called the Pearl, also in 1861, Marie in 1873 and the ever-popular chocolate digestive in 1899. Jacob's Cream Crackers, still one of the most popular savoury biscuits, perfect for loading with cheese or jam, were first manufactured in 1885. It became usual to sell biscuits in special tins, which have become collector's items in their own right.

Now, we are told, that too many biscuits lead to obesity. One commentator even made the ludicrous comment that as they are small, they are to be eaten sparingly, not a whole packet at a time. Now, that really takes the biscuit.

Home Cooking

When I was young, I was one of the few children who liked school dinners, they tasted better than my mother's cooking. She had a strongly held belief that undercooked food could be harmful, so had a tendency to overcook, even burn food. However, burnt porridge would taste OK if you put golden syrup on it and that is what we did. We did not have a pop-up toaster, and I remember the sound of burnt toast being scraped before butter and marmalade were added. Her cake making was good but I was puzzled why she used sour milk. There were often several half empty bottles of curdling milk on the kitchen windowsill, waiting to be used. I now find from the internet that, subject to some caveats, it is quite in order to use sour milk. Who'd have thought it?

Now as an adult, I've realised what a limited diet I've grown used to. On a recent visit to the States, my sister-in-law rustled up some interesting dishes in what seemed to be no time at all.

Banana bread (pictured) made using several overripe bananas, was one of these dishes. I'd never heard of it. Another of her specialities was tuna pasta, which she served with mashed potato. Her grandchildren were especially fond of this. I thought it was good too.

The piece de resistance though was her Swedish meat balls for which the main ingredient was minced beef. She gave me the recipe and I tried my hand at this. I have to say it's very messy to cook and I had lots of dirty dishes and pans.

I invited a couple I know to lunch but because of my lack of confidence decided to make the meat balls in advance and freeze them. Asked what they thought on the day, the wife said they were quite nice, but did I know I could buy them from the supermarket. I checked and the ones in the supermarket were made with a mixture of pork and beef mince, were quite small and didn't come with a creamy sauce. Not the same at all.

Don Alcott, Shirley, Solihull, West Midlands

If you know of a regional delicacy that has all but died out or would like to share your food and drink memories, then let us know via info@bestofbritishmag.co.uk or at the address given on page 4.

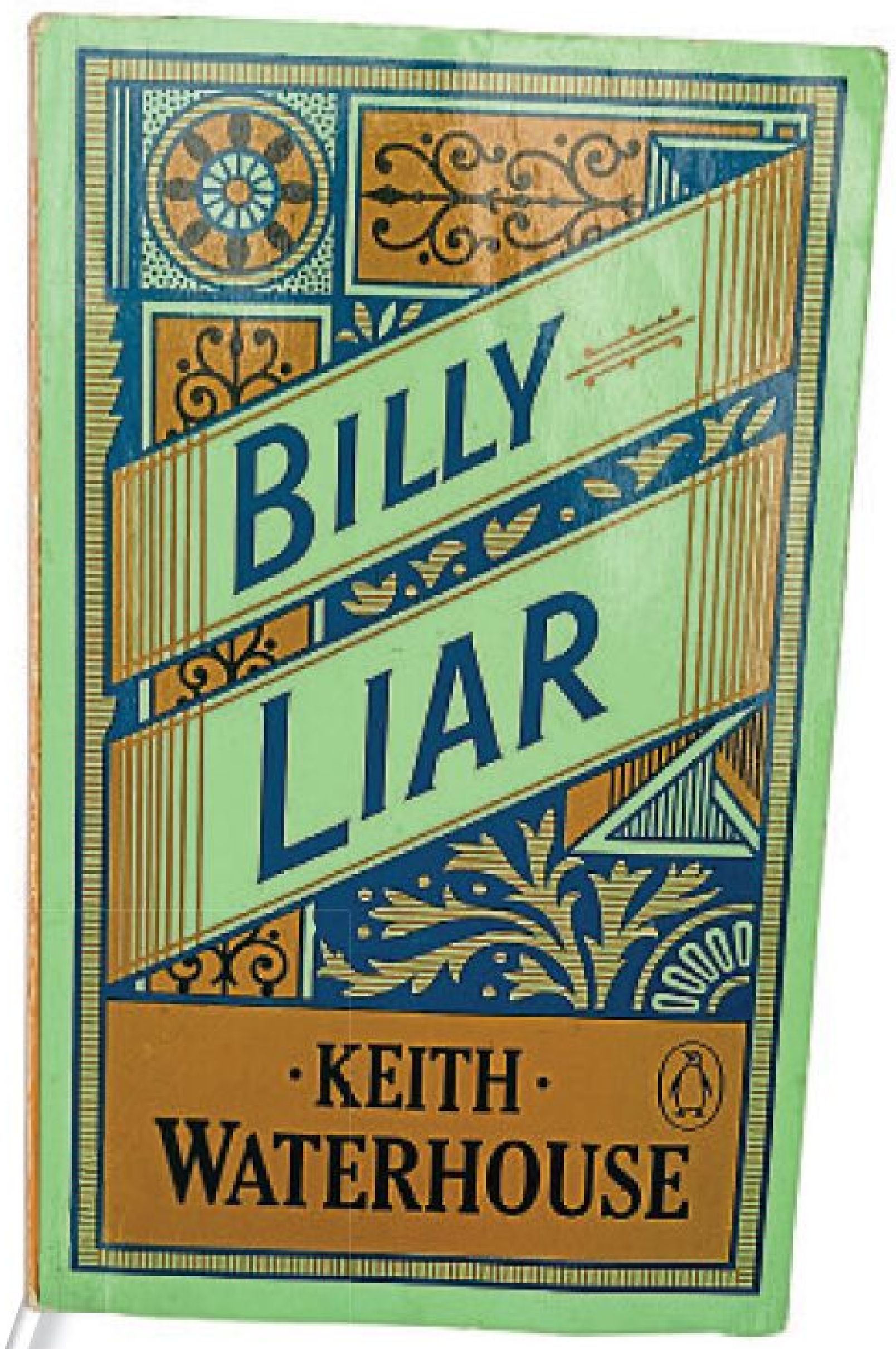
TREASURES In the ATTIC

Brian Howes unearths some nostalgic collectables that might be discarded as worthless junk but actually have a value to today's collectors. Can you estimate what each object might be worth and pick out which one is the big-money item? **The values are printed on page 72.**

PARLOPHONE
THE BEATLES
mono
HELP!

1 Musical memories

With its original vinyl still in immaculate condition, this mono album contains all the fabulous tracks from the Beatles' epic film Help! Produced by George Martin and released in August 1965, Help! was the Beatles' fifth studio album.


BILLY LIAR
·KEITH·
WATERHOUSE

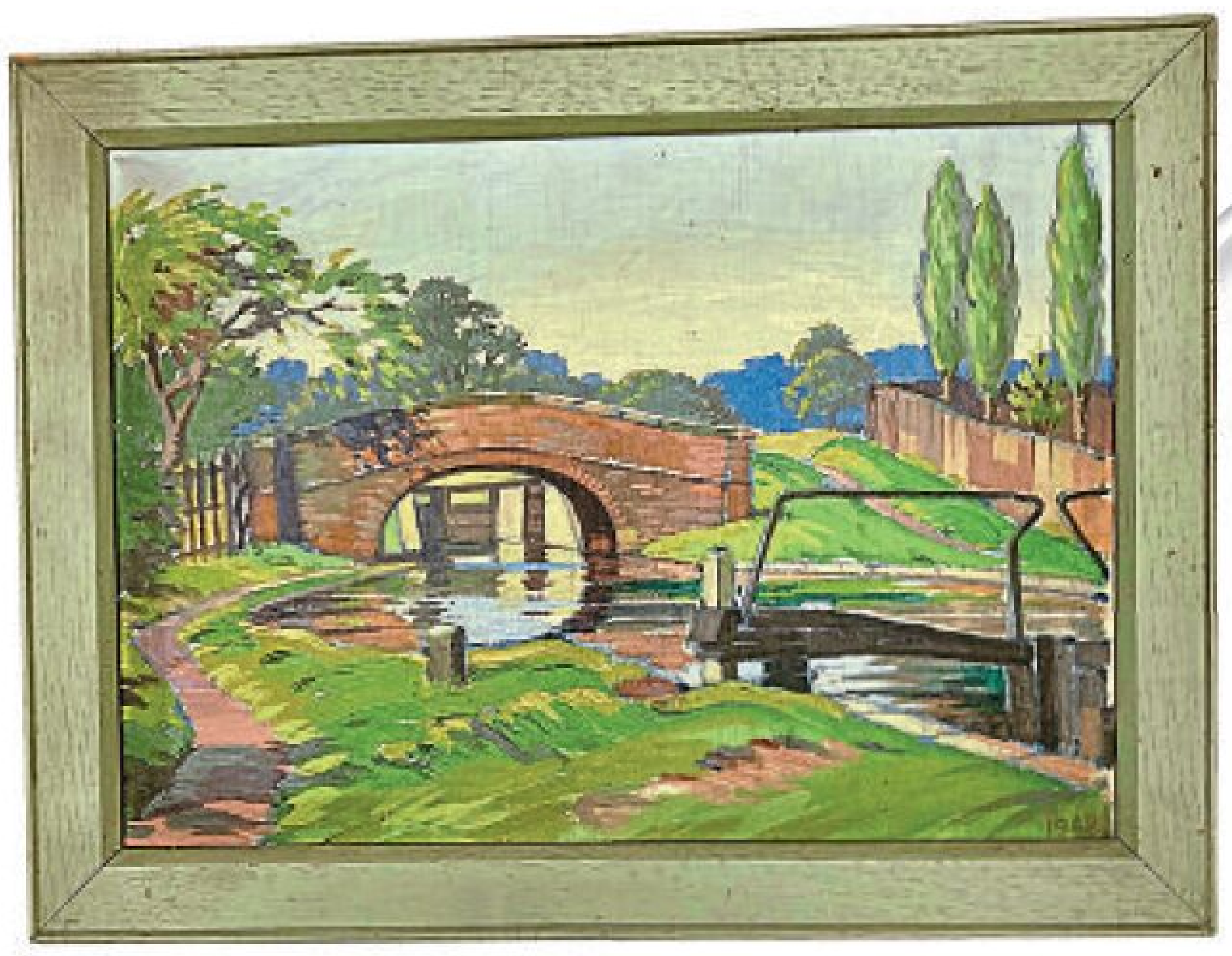
2 Billy's lies

Billy Liar was written in 1959 by Keith Waterhouse and tells the story of young Yorkshire teenager Billy Fisher. The book was adapted into a British CinemaScope comedy-drama film in 1963 starring Tom Courtenay and Julie Christie. I like the way the cover of this Penguin issue resembles a packet of Wills Woodbine cigarettes.

Westward
A104
4mm. SCALE
CAST WHITE METAL
MODEL KIT
BRISTOL LL6B - DUPLE
Royal Blue Express Service Coach
Complete kit of detailed castings, including instructions, glazing etc.
Glue, paint and transfers not included

3 Kits and pieces

Having been an avid model kit builder since childhood, it's always good to find one that you've never made before. This lovely Westward cast white metal kit builds up into an impressive 4mm scale Bristol LL6B Duple single-deck motor coach belonging to Royal Blue Coach Services. Like so many old kits, this one was discovered unbuilt in an attic.

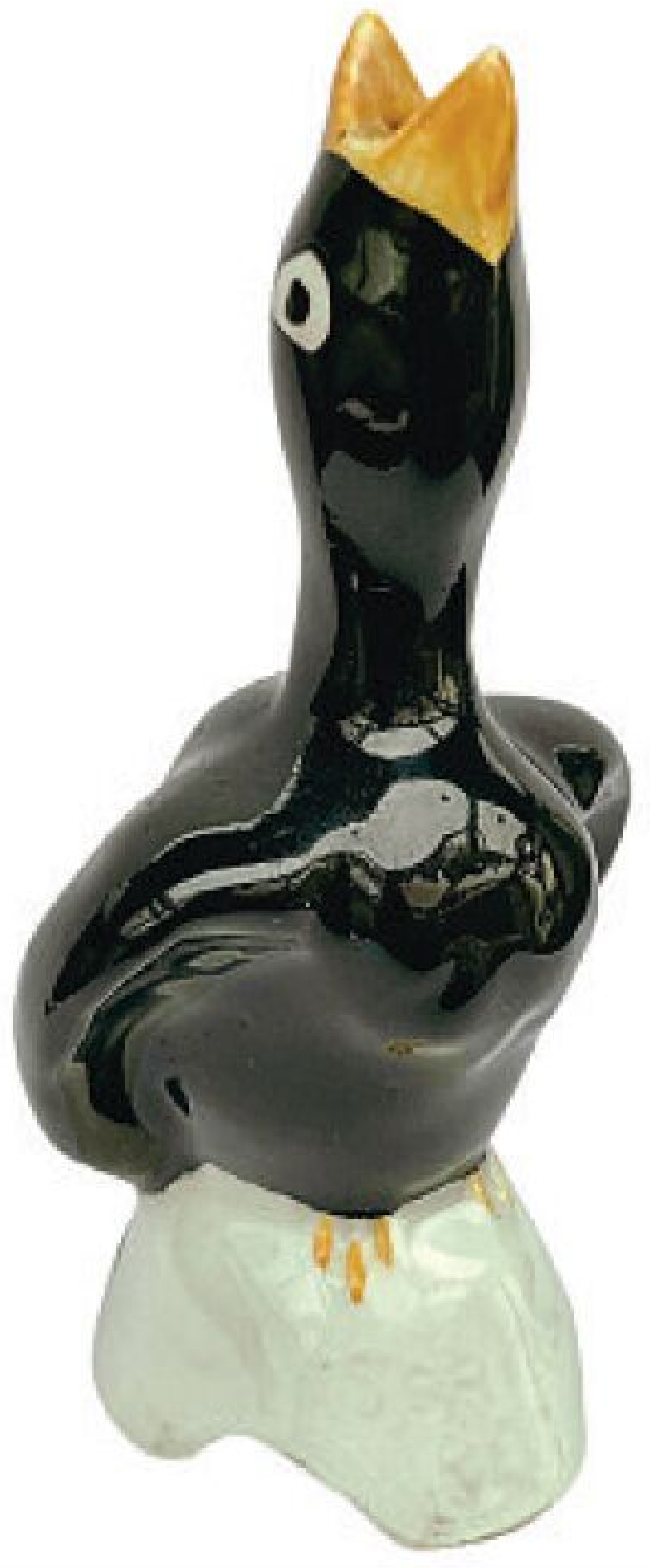


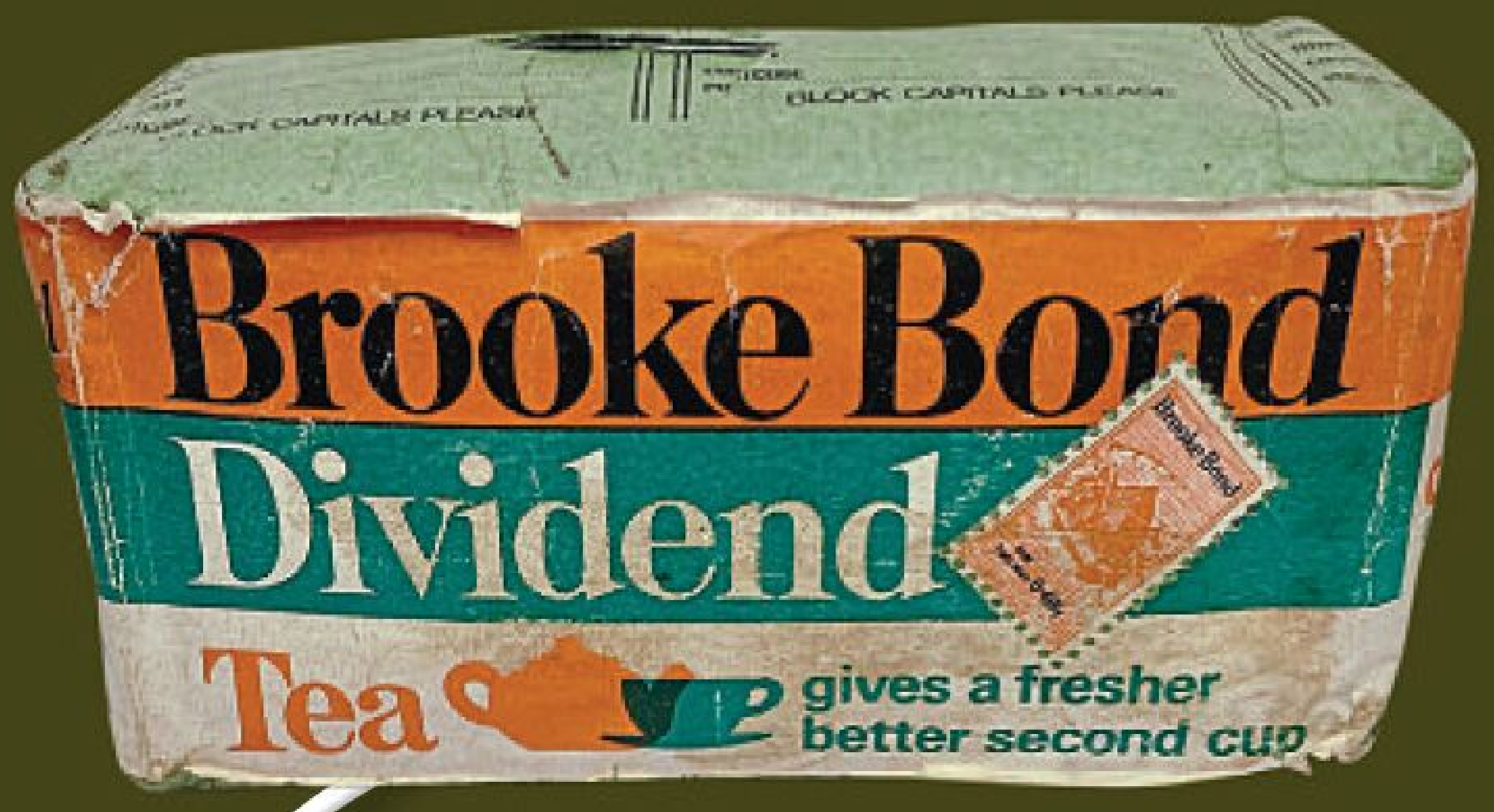
4 Along the cut

This oil painting shows a lovely scene along the cut of an unknown stretch of inland waterway somewhere in the East Midlands. The artist is unknown but the painting is dated 1948. It was purchased at a jumble sale many years ago for 50p which must be considered a real bargain. A lovely piece of social history.

5 Birds for baking

This beautiful little blackbird pie funnel was made at the Midwinter Pottery in the 1940s and is in remarkably good condition for its age. Many British potteries produced pie funnels in all manner of shapes and subjects. Some of them are now collector's items. Midwinter Pottery was founded as WR Midwinter by William Robinson Midwinter in Burslem, Stoke-on-Trent in 1910.



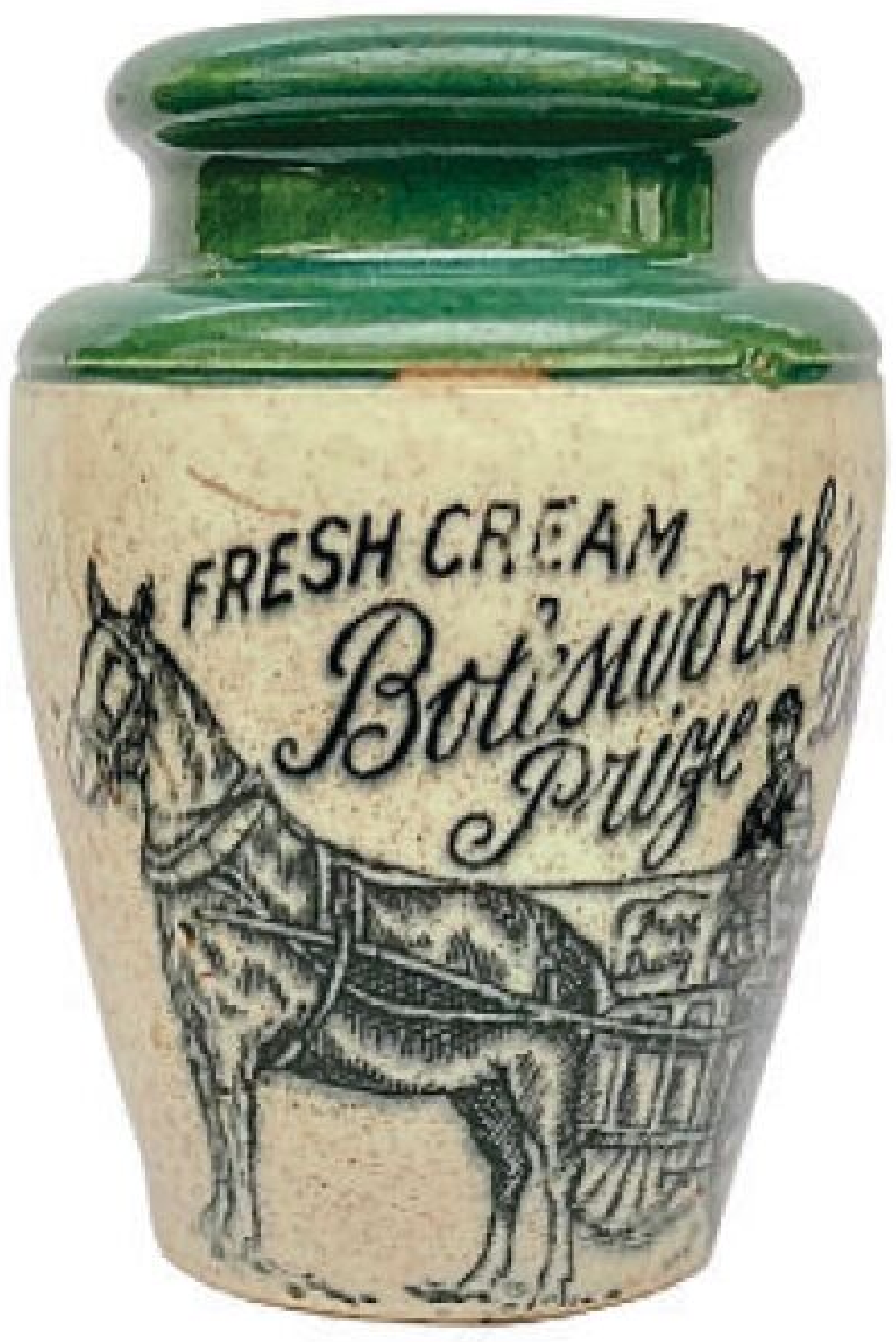

Brooke Bond
Dividend
Tea
gives a fresher better second cup

6 Double dividends

There were always two great reasons to buy Brooke Bond tea when I was a boy. The first was collecting the cards which were neatly tucked inside each packet and glueing them into albums. The second was collecting the dividend stamps on the packet which we glued to a sheet issued by the grocer and exchanged it for goods or cash when full – happy days.

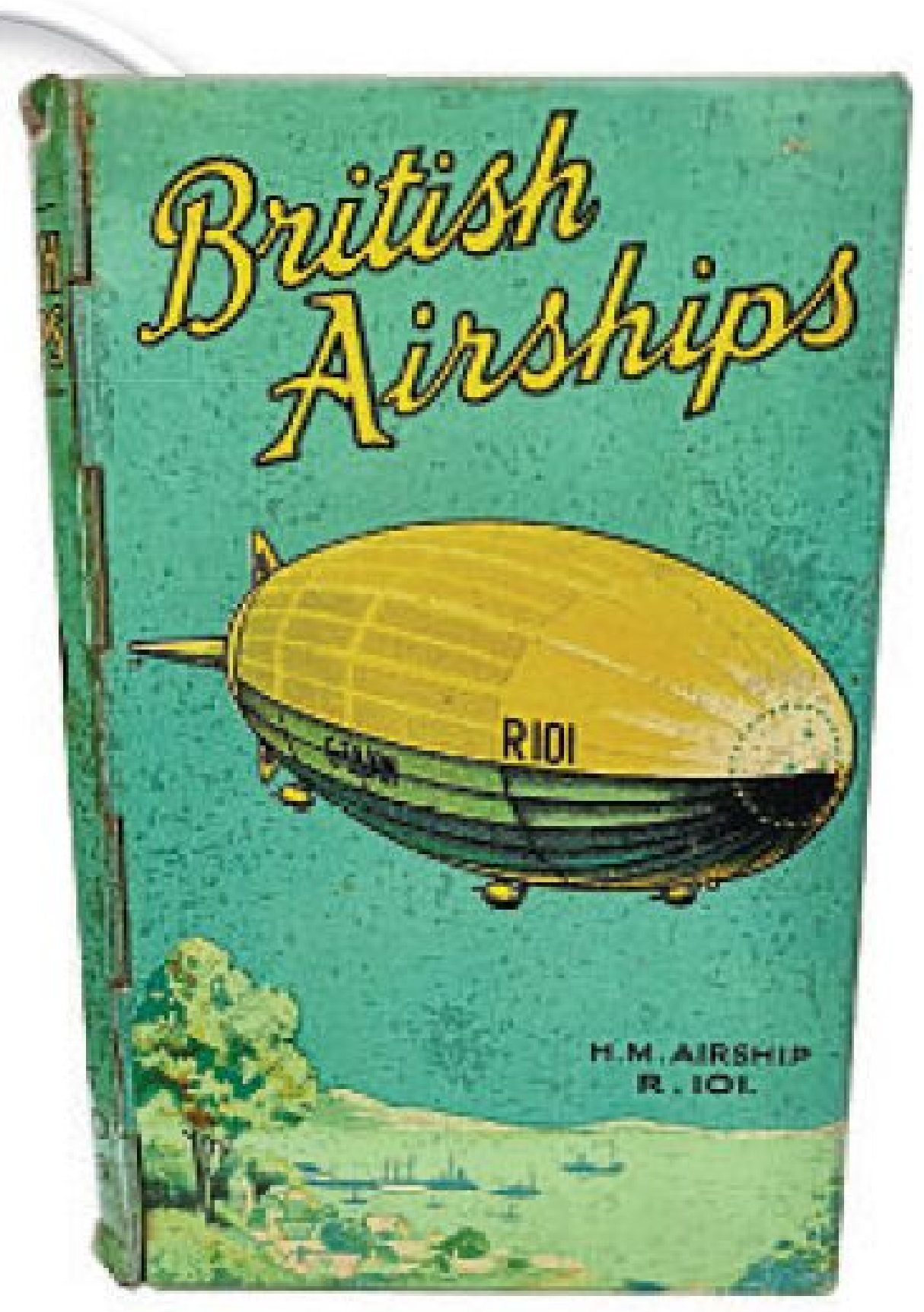
7 Top of the pots

The humble little dairy that used these beautiful little cream pots might have been very modest in size, yet Bolesworth's produced what collectors consider to be top of the pots. No other cream pot shows a picture of a horse-drawn dairy delivery cart and to also have a green glazed top makes it the king of creams. It was unearthed from a rubbish tip in the 1980s.


FRESH CREAM
Bolesworth's
Prize

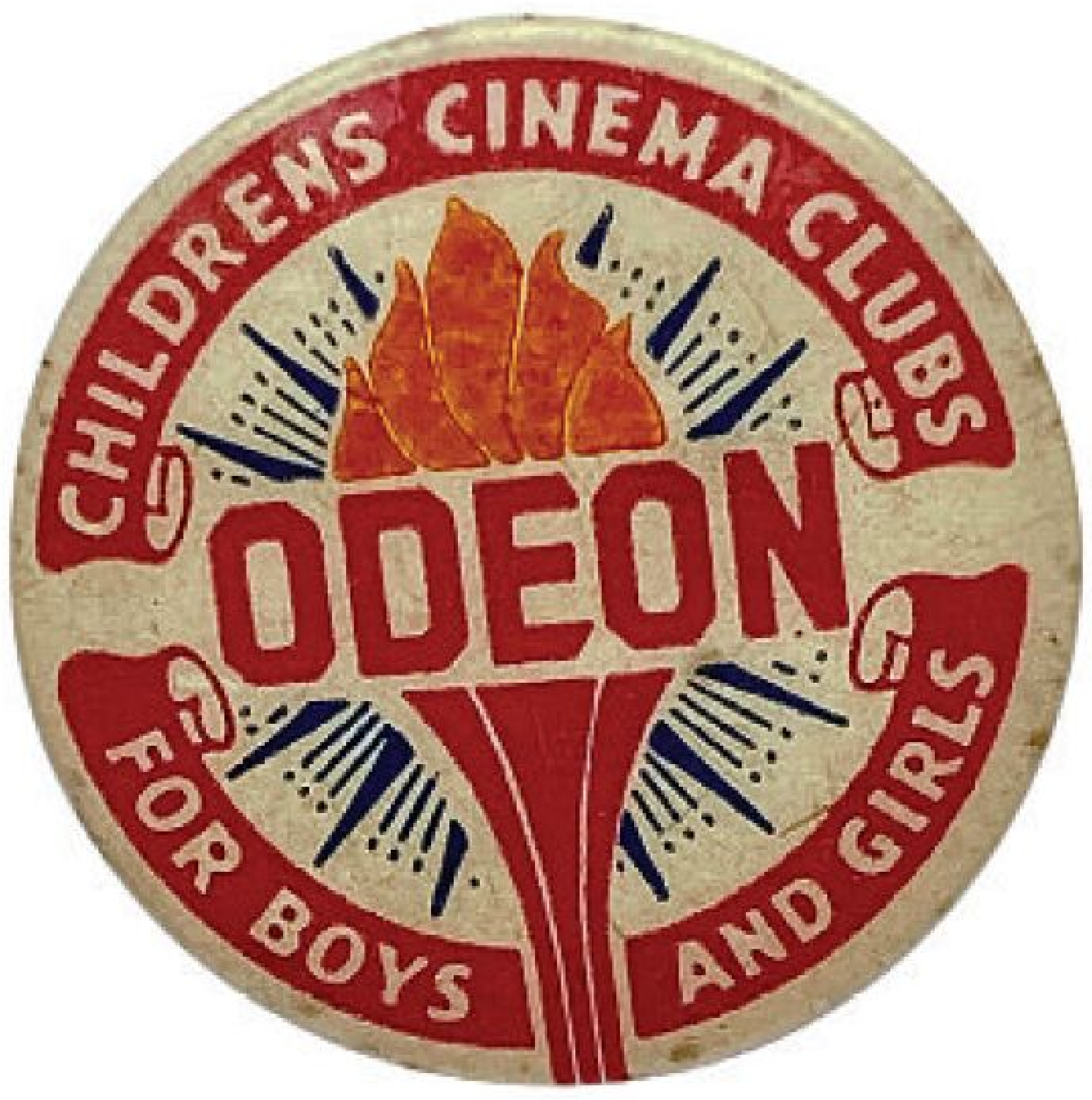
8 Toffee treats

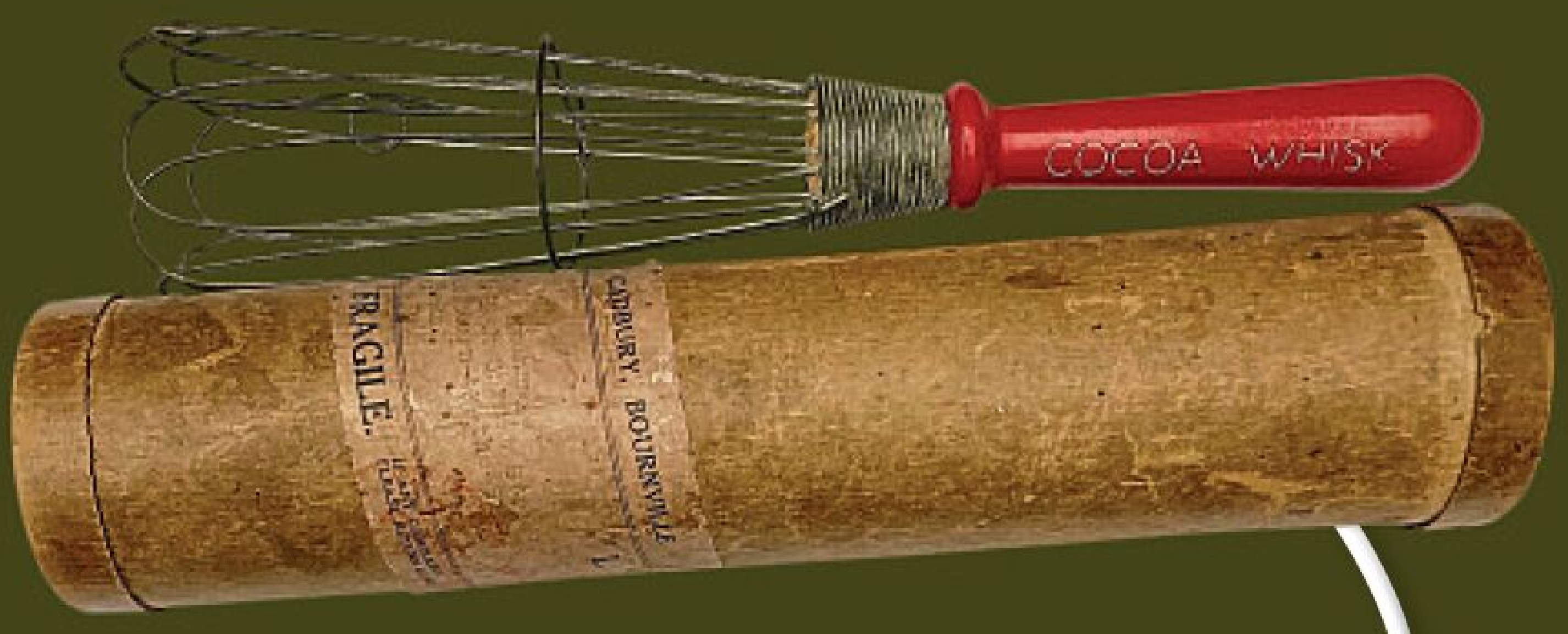
This book-shaped tin was originally sold containing a selection of Lyons' toffees and is one of a set of six similar tins. Each tin celebrates a classic British ship, train, car or aircraft from the 1930s. This one celebrates HM Airship R101 which was launched at Cardington, Bedfordshire on 12 October 1929.


British Airships
R101
H.M. AIRSHIP R.101.

9 Clubbing together

Many of us have very happy memories of children's cinema clubs. We used to go along to the ABC cinema on Saturday mornings and it was always great fun. This button badge, dating from the 1960s, was worn by members of the Odeon Children's Cinema Club for Boys and Girls. It was made by Marples & Beasley Ltd of Birmingham.


CHILDRENS CINEMA CLUBS
ODEON
FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

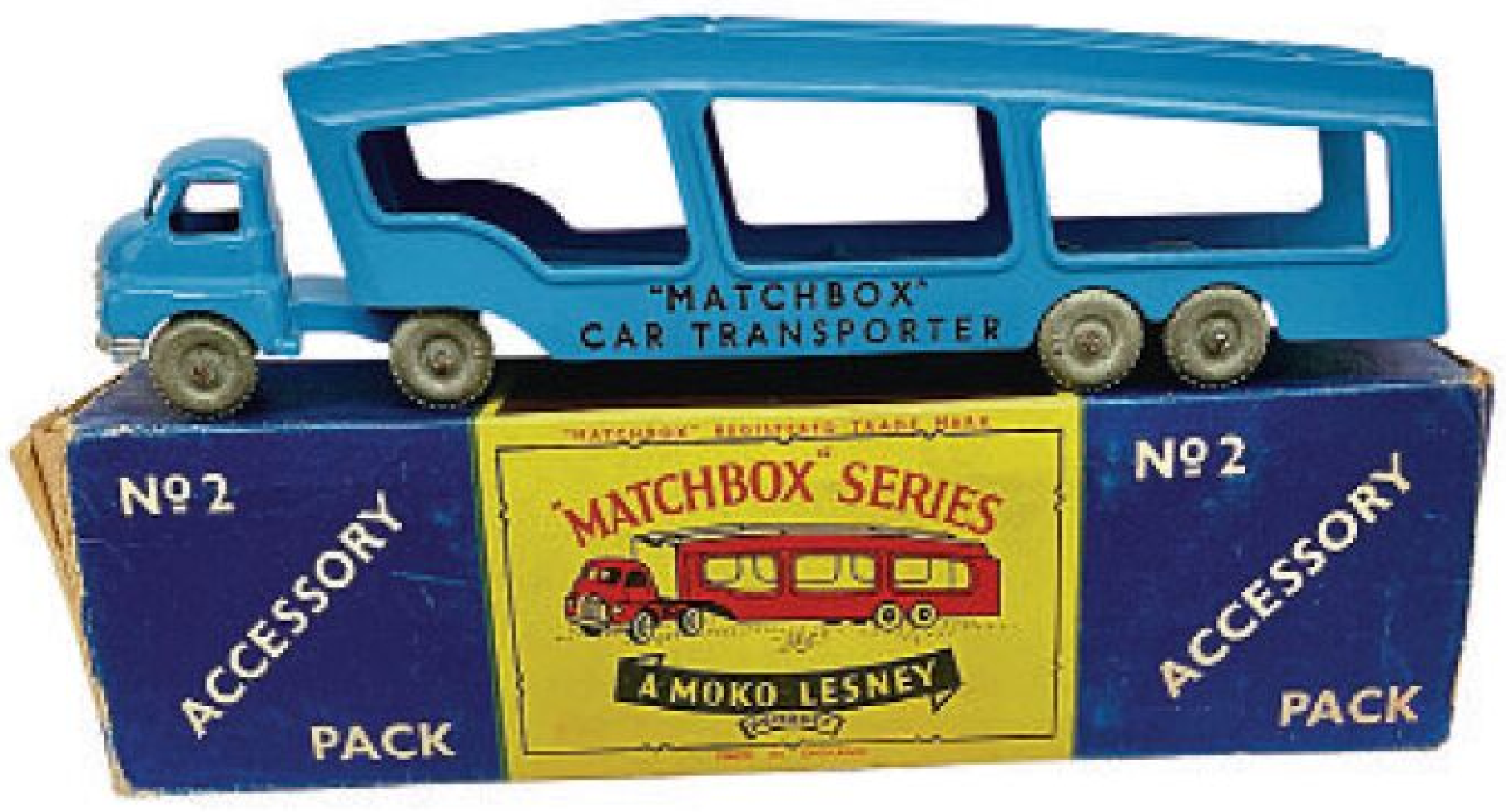

COCOA WHISK
FRAGILE
CADBURY BOURNVILLE

10 Cocoa time

These handy whisks were offered as promotional gifts to drinkers of Cadbury Bournville Cocoa during the 1930s. They complemented the hugely popular stoneware Bournville mixing jugs that were also offered as promotional gifts. This whisk is scarce in that it was found with its original packing tube.

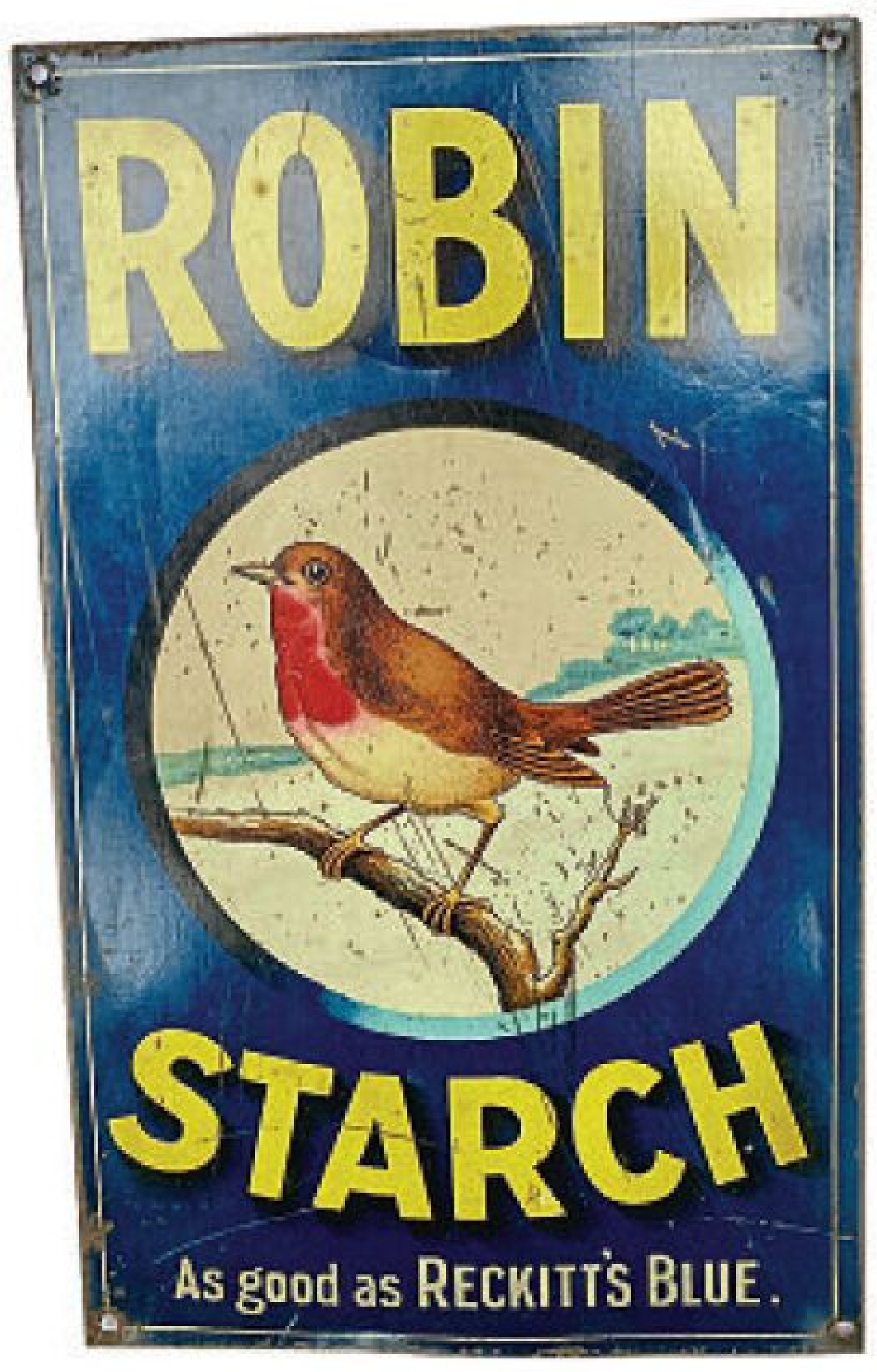
11 Boxing clever

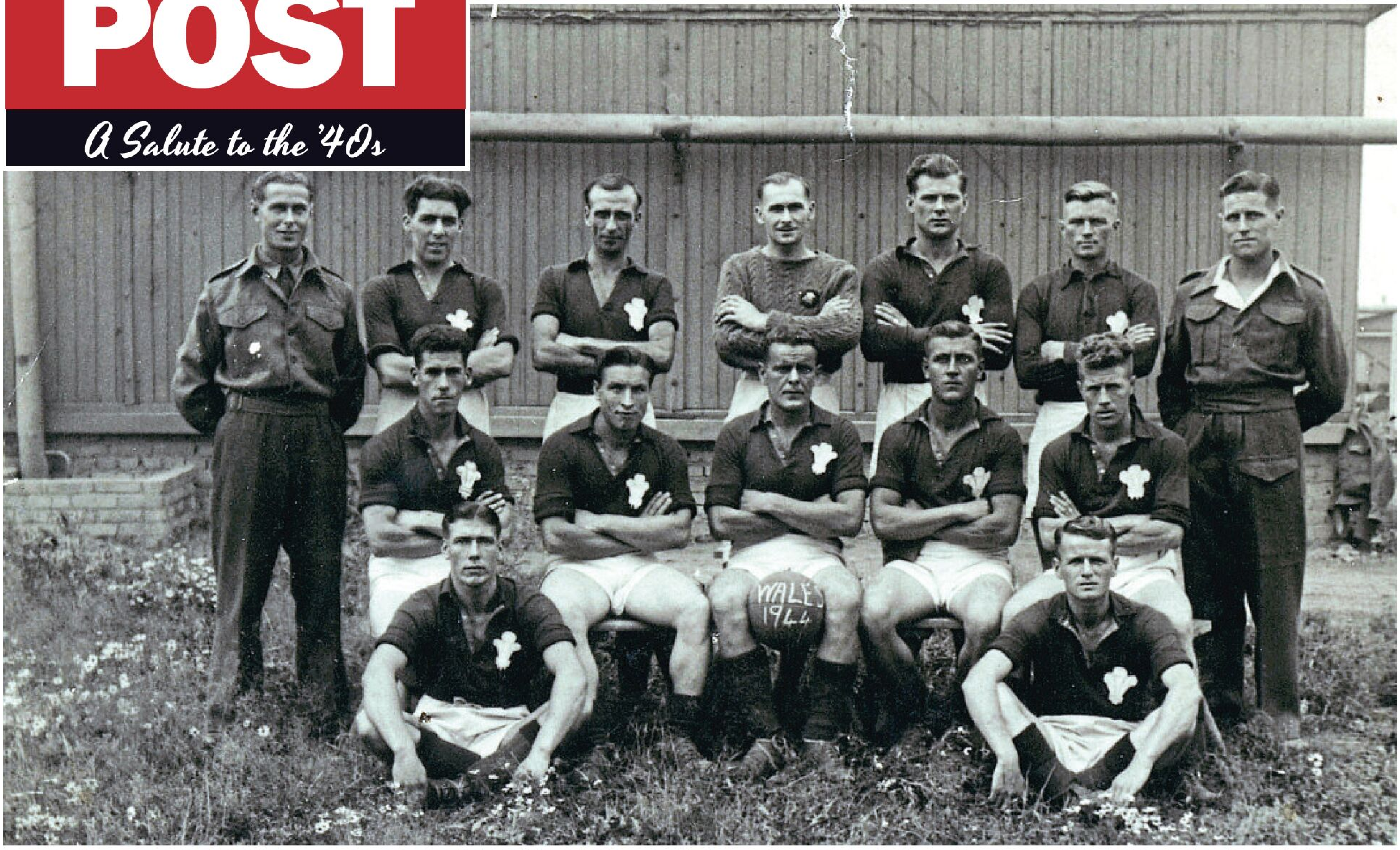
Some road vehicles were simply too big to fit inside a matchbox, so Lesney Products launched a new range of special accessory packs in extended boxes to complement its motor garages. One of them was this smart-looking Bedford car transporter which first became available in toy shops in 1957 with an original price tag of 3*s* 11*d*.


"MATCHBOX" CAR TRANSPORTER
Nº 2
ACCESSORY PACK
"MATCHBOX" SERIES
A MOKO LESNEY

12 Whiter washes

Robin Starch was once a hugely popular product in Britain and played a valuable role every wash day. It not only stiffened shirt collars but also made washing white rather than grey. Introduced in the 1890s, Robin "new" Starch was an improved starch containing a borax lubricant. This original tinplate sign dates from the 1920s.


ROBIN
STARCH
As good as RECKITT'S BLUE.



THE GOALKEEPER OF AUSCHWITZ

John Greeves spoke to Ron Jones, a survivor of Auschwitz and an 800-mile death march, shortly before he died aged 102

Sometimes the most extraordinary things happen to everyday people. Had it not been for a clerical error, Ron Jones from Bassaleg, Newport would have encountered a completely different war. Ron worked in a reserved occupation as a wire drawer and was surprised when (unlike his 41 fellow wire drawers) he was suddenly conscripted. Apparently, a typist had made a mistake and put his form in the incoming mail instead of the outgoing mail and so Ron found himself enlisted into the South Wales Borders in 1940.

After serving in Crete, he was later captured outside Benghazi, Libya. From there, Ron was transported along with other British prisoners to PoW camp 65 near Altamura in southern Italy. "Italy was a terrible place," said Ron. "The amount of food allocated pitiful. If it wasn't for the Red Cross parcels that came now and then, I don't think I'd make it." Ron was later moved to a camp just outside Rome in July or August 1943.

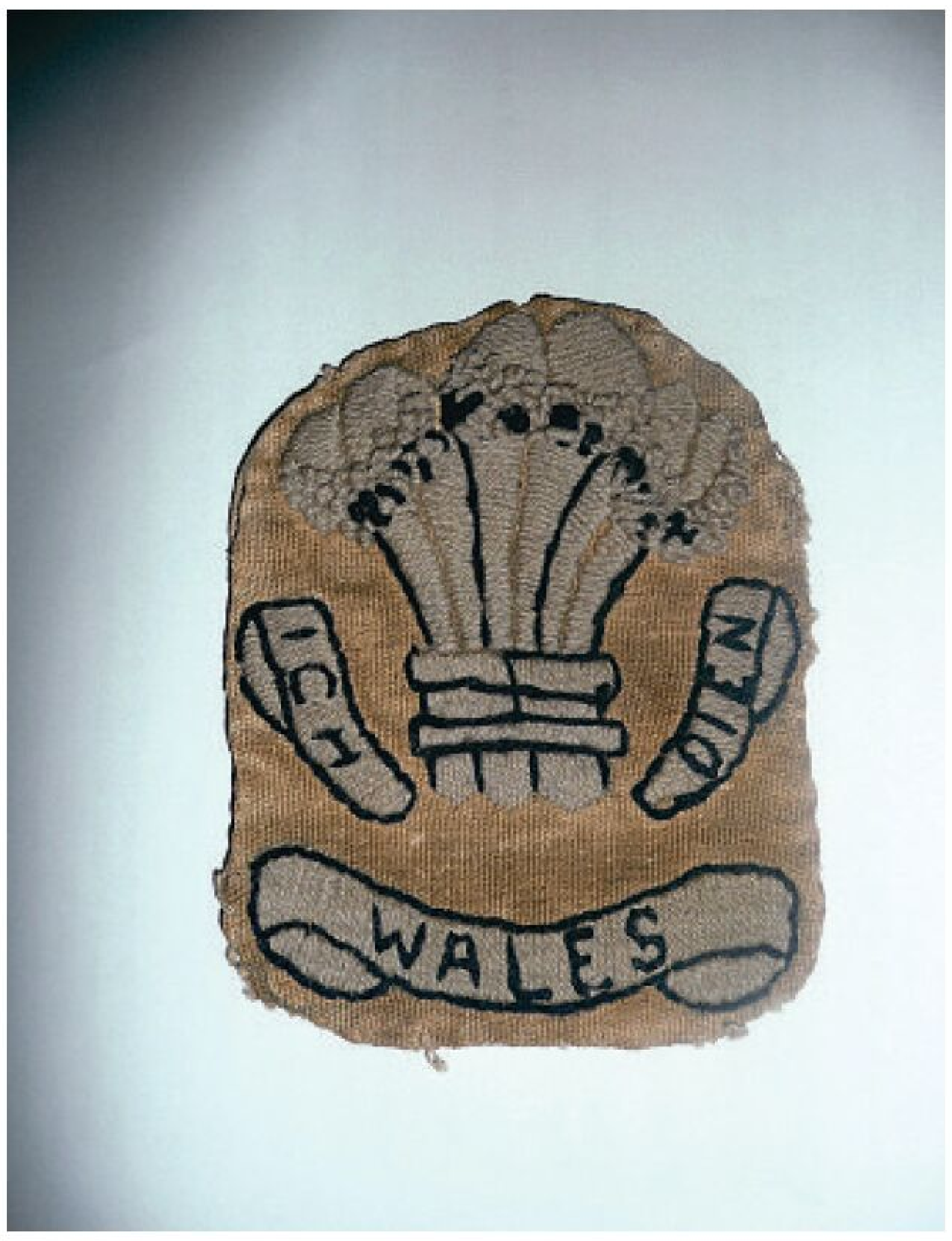
One day, the prisoners were told the Italians needed workers for their car factory in Milan and were asked if any of them were engineers. Many put their hands up tempted by the prospect of better food. The prisoners soon discovered they weren't going to Milan when 280 PoWs were crammed 40 to each cattle truck and sent across Europe without water or latrines for several days. "Just imagine how humiliating it was in those trucks with no toilets – nothing... we used one of the corners as a toilet."

When they arrived at Stalag IV-B Mühlberg, they were deloused and had their uniforms cleaned, then they were sent onwards to Stalag VIII-B Lamsdorf, a large holding camp in Silesia, Poland. They were told they would be working in a dye factory before they embarked on their final train journey. When they arrived at their destination, they had no idea where they were. All they saw were barbed-wire fences with sentry posts and men digging trenches in pyjamas. It was October and very cold. When they asked a guard who these people were, he replied brusquely "Juden" ("Jews") as if they should have known.

Auschwitz is just outside Kraków in Poland and was the Nazis' largest concentration and extermination camp. It was split into three main sections: Auschwitz I, the administrative centre for the enormous complex; Auschwitz II or Birkenau, the extermination camp; and Auschwitz III, also known as the Buna-Monowitz site. Here, slave labour was rented out to German companies to undertake industrial production with no regard for human welfare or lives. The life expectancy of Jewish workers at Buna Werke was three to four months. Those deemed unfit for work were gassed at Auschwitz II. There were 28 sub camps in Auschwitz III. When the British PoWs first arrived, they were housed in PoW camp E711 and after two or three weeks they were moved to E715, a work

Top: The Wales PoW team outside the huts at Auschwitz. Goalkeeper Ron is fourth from the right in the back row.

Photographs: (Team) Ron Jones, (Ron Jones/Badge) John Greeves



Left: Ron Jones pictured a week before his death in September 2019 aged 102. Right: The badge Ron embroidered from old socks to go on his football jersey.

camp opposite the Buna-Monowitz concentration camp.

"There was always this terrible smell in the air and I asked a Pole what it was and I didn't believe him," Ron said. "It took us all about a month to realise it was a death camp before we believed it." Ron worked 12 hours a day, six days a week in IG Farben, alongside Jewish slave labour and Polish civilians, producing synthetic petrol and rubber from coal. The same company also manufactured Zyklon B, the gas used in the gas chambers.

Initially, the British prisoners refused to undertake war work, which was contrary to the Geneva Convention, but were told if they disobeyed they would be shot. Despite this violation, British PoWs were treated much better than the Jewish slave labourers who were beaten and forced to work beyond exhaustion until they could no longer toil.

The British soldiers weren't completely immune from Nazi brutality. Corporal Reynolds was shot by a guard after refusing to climb a 60ft cylinder stack to change a filter. He pleaded, saying he suffered from heights and would fall, and that he didn't have the appropriate winter clothing, but all in vain.

Even though the Red Cross parcels arrived once a month, the PoWs still suffered from malnutrition. Ron was constantly covered in boils and abscesses due to the poor diet. Despite being a non-smoker, Ron wrote to his wife Gwladys and asked her to send him cigarettes. "English cigarettes were currency," Ron told me and could be exchanged for eggs and bread with some of the civilian workers. On one occasion he exchanged several hundred cigarettes with a Pole for a Rolex Oyster watch. This would later save his life.

PoWs were not allowed to talk to Jewish prisoners, but they did in secret and gave them food when they could. On one occasion Ron received a food parcel from the Red Cross, so he gave his German ration, a piece of sausage, to a Jew called Josef. A couple of days later Josef gave Ron a signet ring he had made from a piece of steel pipe. Like many other Jews, Josef disappeared shortly afterwards. Most Jews realised the desperate fragility of their lifespan as slave labour but could do little to fend off the inevitable.

Sunday was a different day to the rest of the week and Ron would turn out in the summer afternoon to play football. The Red Cross had provided four sets of kits – England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales – and two footballs. Ron was the Wales goalkeeper and customised the Welsh shirts by embroidering badges showing the Prince of Wales feathers, made from old socks. The matches were a big attraction, and hundreds of spectators would turn out to watch. Life wasn't without further tragedy and on Sunday 20 August 1944 the United States Air Force bombed IG Farben's factories. One bomb fell on the British PoW camp with the loss of 38 British lives. From December in the same year, British PoWs in E715 ceased to receive any more Red Cross parcels.

Towards the end of the war, as the Russians advanced, British PoWs left the concentration camp and undertook a death march of 800 miles towards Germany. Accounts vary, but Ron maintains he marched with about 230 men and the German guards, often criss-crossing the countryside to avoid allied detection. Ron estimates they covered 800 miles in 17 weeks. Men died along the march, collapsing into the freezing snow where conditions remained -15C to -20C. "I remember kicking a pig out of the way once and pinching the potato he was eating." Ron's boots eventually fell apart, and he had to wrap sacks around his feet. One day, a German officer happened to spot Ron's watch. He could have taken it, but instead exchanged it for a sack of bread, which undoubtedly saved Ron and a number of other lives.

Out of the 230 men in the column, Ron estimates 150 were left alive at the end of the death march. At Regensburg, the German guards abandoned them in a barn and the PoWs were liberated by the Americans. Ron eventually returned home. His weight had dropped from 13 to little more than seven stone. If it had not been for the love and care of his wife, Gwladys, he doubts he would have made a full recovery and for several years he suffered from dreadful nightmares. It was only in more recent years he spoke about his experience, "because people wanted to know". As a very modest man, he never regarded himself as remarkable, but simply as a person who tackled everything with a smile and got on with life.

Ron died aged 102 on 8 September 2019 and I was fortunate enough to speak to him a week before he passed away. He was a great guy, always lucid and a fervent supporter of Newport County AFC and was still driving his car well into his 90s to attend matches. He dedicated his later years to selling poppies for the Royal British Legion, for which he was awarded the British Empire Medal.

Today, much of Auschwitz I and Auschwitz II remains as a stark memorial, while Auschwitz III no longer exists. Near the area where the camp was located is a monument built by the local people in homage to the prisoners deported there and murdered by the Germans during the war, leaving only memories and testimonies to endure as a reminder of the dark side of mankind's nature and the capability our species has, both for good and evil.

The Auschwitz Goalkeeper: A Prisoner of War's True Story by Joe Lovejoy and Ron Jones was published by Gomer Press in 2013.

Round the
AUCTION HOUSES

Every week at auction houses up and down the country, a varied host of collectables are put up for sale at general and specialist events, offering everything from top-end treasures to more modest items. **David Brown** picks a selection of recent gems that have found new homes, and looks ahead to forthcoming sales.

LOT 236 Julien's Auctions – Played, Worn & Torn, 20-21 November 2024 (juliensauctions.com)

George Harrison's 1958 Resonet Futurama six-string guitar, that saw extensive stage and studio use with the Beatles in the period 1959-1961, sold for more than double its initial estimate at a sale of music-related items at a Nashville, US auction. The guitar, which cost Harrison about £58, was played by him with the Beatles at both the Cavern Club, Liverpool and Star Club, Hamburg, among many other performances. Harrison revealed that the instrument was "very difficult to play" but he obviously persevered with it. The Futurama was regarded as an inexpensive alternative to the more famous US-built Fender Stratocaster. The instrument and its case was purchased at Frank Hessy's Music Store, Liverpool, on 20 November 1959, paid for in 44 instalments with his mother guaranteeing the higher purchase agreement as Harrison was a 16-year old apprentice electrician at the time.

SOLD FOR £1.03m

LOT 3008 Ewbanks – Classic, Modern Cars & Automobilia, 10 December 2024 (ewbankauctions.co.uk)

A 1929 Model T Ford was among the varied vehicles offered for sale at this Surrey-based auction. The historic Ford was described as running well with much recent maintenance and refurbishment. It features original paintwork with characteristic patina reflecting its age. The wooden wheels were reported as being in good order and new tyres have been fitted all round. The interior and roof have also been recently replaced. It is registered for UK road use with current paperwork. The pre-sale estimate was £8,000-12,000.

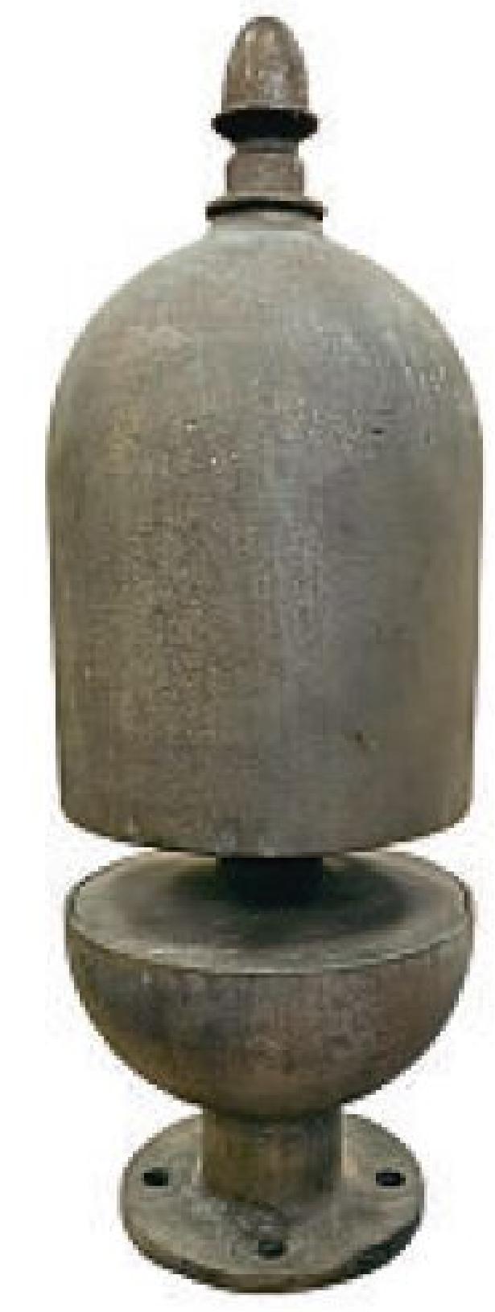
SOLD FOR £12,300

LOT 27 Gildings – Antiques & Collectors, 7 January (gildings.co.uk)

As part of a general collector's sale, a number of items relating to the famous World War Two Dambusters raid and 617 Squadron proved extremely popular at this sale in Market Harborough, Leicestershire. A black and white photograph of Wing Commander Guy Gibson in a silver plated 24x16.5cm frame engraved "Dam-Busters" together with RAF cloth wings. The text states that the wings were presented in February 1994 by Janet de Gaynesford (Gibson's cousin) to the Dam's Collection owned by Derrick Warren in Coventry. An accompanying handwritten and signed letter confirms that the wings were given to her by Gibson in March 1941. All 54 items from the private collection sold, raising a total of £24,000 against pre-sale estimates of £8,000-10,000.

SOLD FOR £4,200

LOT 53 Thomas N Miller – Full Steam Ahead!, 8 January (millersauctioneers.co.uk)



Marine collectables from a property in Whitley Bay were offered in a Newcastle-based sale with a varied selection including steam engines, nautical and diving instruments, cased gauges, pictures, ship's lamps and bells, models etc. Among the highlights was a heavy brass steam whistle, height 50cm, that was estimated at £60-80 and made much more. Another interesting item was a brass ship's telegraph, 100cm height, by Donkin & Son Ltd, Newcastle upon Tyne, that reached a hammer price of £750. The black dial had red and white lettering for Astern and Ahead with commands Full, Half, Slow, Stand By, Stop, Dead Slow, Slow, Half and Full, upon a tapering column.

SOLD FOR £800

COMING UP

LOTS TBA Charterhouse Auctions – Classic & Vintage Car Auction, 27 March (charterhouse-cars.com)

The proceeds made from the sale of a 1957 military Jeep are to be kindly donated by the vendor to the Dorset & Somerset Air Ambulance. Made by Hotchkiss under licence from Jeep, the model M201 was the standard light utility vehicle used by the French army from just after World War Two. Production ended in 1966, with the final M201 withdrawn from service in 2001. "The owner bought the Jeep from us nearly 20 years ago," said auctioneer Richard Bromell. "While he has enjoyed owning the Jeep, he has not used it since 2020 and decided to auction it and give the proceeds to this worthy charity."

When you are placing your bid(s) please be sure about what you are bidding for. Remember to take into account that on top of the hammer price, you will have to pay a buyer's premium (usually with VAT payable on the premium). Also, allow for post and packing with remote bidding.

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Dreamers

Martin Claytor goes behind the scenes of Supertramp's Crime of the Century album

In late 1974, a band that had no success with their two previous albums released a third – hoping that a change in lineup and musical style would bring more luck. By early 1975, their Crime of the Century recording was riding high in the album charts and would prove to be the commercial breakthrough that launched British band Supertramp into one of the world's most successful acts over the next decade.

Formed in 1970 by songwriters Rick Davies and Roger Hodgson, their early progressive rock style was partly the result of their differing musical backgrounds and preferences. These lyrical and musical variations would play a big part in future songs, but it still needed the right musicians to complete the picture. It would be another three years, and more changes of members, before what would be known as the classic lineup came into being – with saxophonist John Helliwell, bassist Dougie Thomson and drummer Bob Siebenberg joining Davies and Hodgson.

John Helliwell, who also played keyboards, the clarinet and sang backing vocals, explains how he came to join Supertramp. "I was playing in a band in Germany, mostly on US airbases, and thinking of coming home when my wife said that Dougie Thomson had called for me. He invited me to join Supertramp who were rehearsing in London. I knew Dougie from his time playing with me in the Alan Bown Set and I had seen Supertramp a couple of times in the past. I liked their music, so as soon as I returned from Germany, I went to rehearse with them. We had an immediate rapport, so I stuck around."

The band now had an extremely talented and more settled lineup – one that would stay together for the next 10 years. A change in personnel also helped the move towards a more pop oriented style – John Helliwell commenting that "it was the addition of Dougie, Bob and me that made the difference… the combination of us with Rick and Roger seemed to work very well and that, coupled with the fact that we did not work in the 'normal' rock group way, led to interesting and adventurous sounds." This sound also featured one slightly more unusual instrument; the Wurlitzer piano – a Roger Hodgson favourite.

Sent away to rehearse, the band eventually had more than enough

Top: Clockwise from left: Bob Siebenberg, Rick Davies, Dougie Thomson, Roger Hodgson and John Helliwell, Supertramp's "classic lineup".

Photograph: (Supertramp) John Bryson/Shutterstock, (John Halliwell) Creative Commons/Sven Mandel

Supertramp
CRIME OF THE CENTURY

**Left: John Helliwell was playing in a band in Germany, mostly at US airbases, when he was invited to join Supertramp.
Right: Taken from the album Crime of the Century, Dreamer peaked at No 13 on singles chart in February 1975.**

demo songs to record – but the need to choose a strong final selection was vitally important if Supertramp were ever going to be a success, as John Helliwell points out. “When we had finished the demos and met Ken Scott, the engineer, we knew we had something very good. It had to be because, after two commercially unsuccessful albums, we had what we considered one more chance to produce a good album.”

The band’s confidence was fully justified; in February 1975, just months after being released, the catchily titled Crime of the Century spent the first of seven weeks in the Top 10 of the UK albums chart, peaking at No 4 in March. Selling in the thousands, as well as receiving rave reviews, the album was also a huge commercial success in other countries with particularly large sales in the US, Canada and parts of Europe. Supertramp had finally broken through.

Such was its overall success, in subsequent years, Crime of the Century would continue to sell well and would frequently appear in lists of favourite albums – from both the public and prestigious music polls.

With strong songs, such as Bloody Well Right and School proving popular, album sales were also boosted by another track in particular. Dreamer, written several years previously by Roger Hodgson and subsequently recorded for the album, was soon picked up by radio stations and became a Top 20 hit single in the UK – it also brought an important bonus, recognised by John Helliwell.

“Dreamer brought our name to the attention of the public – the superb sound of the album, a hi-fi quality, added to the strong musicality of the songs to produce a very favourable reaction.”

Also attracting attention was the eye-catching album cover, showing a pair of hands gripping what looks like prison cell bars floating in the empty darkness of outer space – a reference to the title of the album.

Building upon this popularity, the band started touring more regularly. From playing only a relatively small number of UK concerts in 1974, Supertramp performed extensively across the world over the next three years. They also managed to record two more albums in this period Crisis? What Crisis and Even in the Quietest Moments – both selling well in various countries. The latter also provided another hit single – Give a Little Bit proving especially popular in the US and Canada, along with the UK.

> **“The fact that we did not work in the ‘normal’ rock group way led to interesting and adventurous sounds.”**

As more fame followed, the band released their most popular album in 1979, Breakfast in America – the fun style of the tracks came about for various reasons as John Helliwell remembers. “It was a natural progression from us starting in the UK and then moving to California; having the freedom to express ourselves and record through the mid to late 70s and ageing five years that brought us to the state of mind we were in by 1979. We were happier with life, and we didn’t have a theme to work on, like Crime of the Century.”

Another factor in the album’s success, as it had been previously, was the contrasting writing styles of Rick Davies and Roger Hodgson – John Helliwell appreciating that “Rick and Roger brought two ways of looking at the world to their songwriting. This duality made our music interesting; we could get through to people on a few levels.”

Hit singles from the recording still seem just as familiar today as they were more than 40 years ago, particularly the album’s title track. The bouncy introduction to Breakfast in America leading to the memorable opening lyrics: “Take a look at my girlfriend. She’s the only one I got. Not much of a girlfriend. I’ve never seemed to get a lot.”

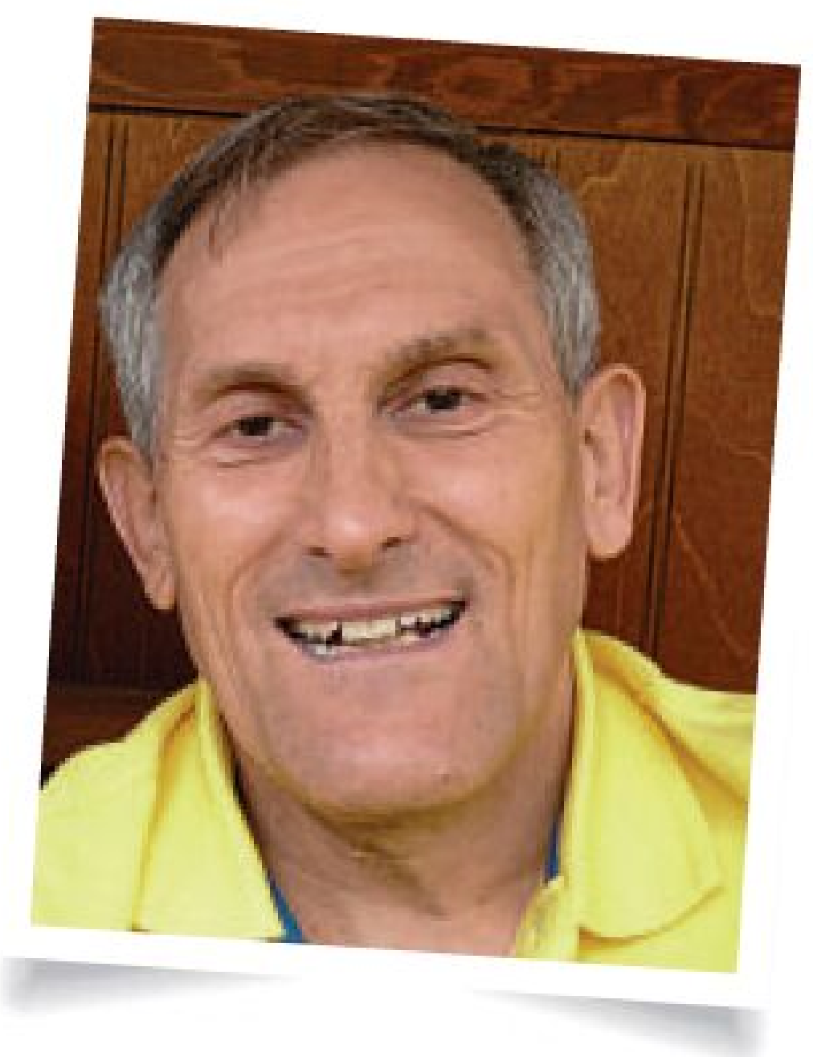
With The Logical Song, Take the Long Way Home and Goodbye Stranger also selling well across the world, Supertramp were now at the peak of their popularity – it had been a tumultuous five years since the new lineup had started the ball rolling.

Worldwide tours and a further album, featuring the hit single It’s Raining Again followed – but in 1983, the lineup that had come together so crucially broke up, when Roger Hodgson left. Despite remaining popular, with some subsequent success and various reunions with a combination of new and old members, the 10 years between 1973 and 1983 remain Supertramp’s glory years. It had all started with the stunning breakthrough of that last chance album as John Helliwell recognises when he comments that “my favourite single is probably Give a Little Bit but the most important song for me is Crime of the Century.” The title track from the album that had catapulted Supertramp to stardom.

Yesterday Remembered

We welcome your memories of around 800 words and pay £20 for each story published. Don't forget to include pictures with your submission.

Quo Jumper



Peter J Gaskin of Ipswich, Suffolk remembers:

I have been a Status Quo fan for many years and try to see them every time they come to my home town of Ipswich in Suffolk. In 1999, the Quo embarked on their Under the Influence tour, visiting pubs around the UK and beyond which were also music venues and had earned the right to stage a Quo gig by entering their names in a ballot. One such successful venue was the Ipswich Railway but I knew it would be almost impossible to get a ticket because there would only be about 200 available.

In conjunction with the tour, the Quo were also doing an album-signing session at the local HMV store on the same day as the gig, so I decided to go and see them there. The signing was to take place at 4.30pm, so I arrived around 2.30pm only to find that there was already a queue outside of probably 100 or more and it was getting longer by the minute.

> **Not only was I able to get my CD signed by all the band, I had the bonus of a handshake and a few words with Francis Rossi.**

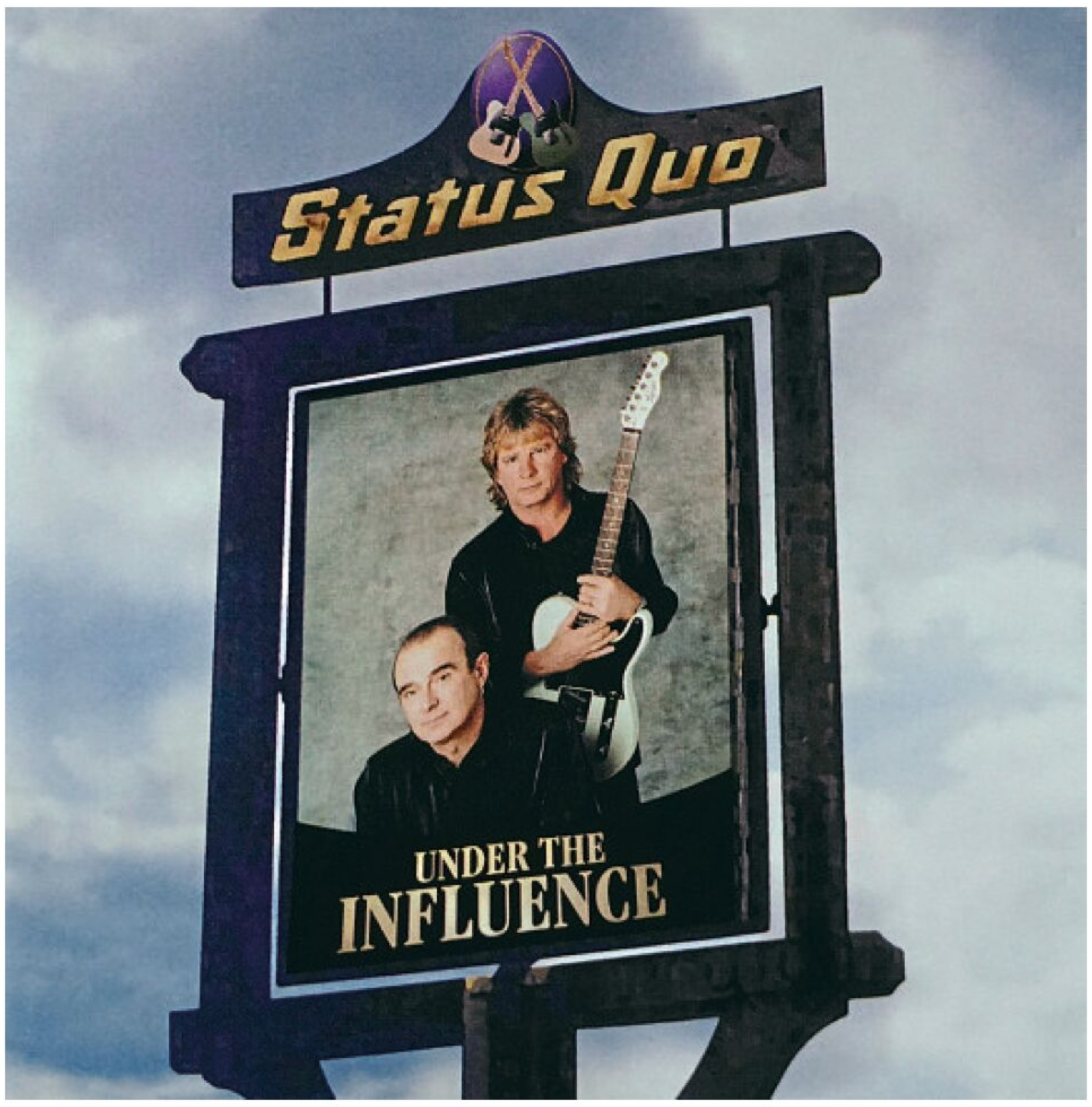
Joining the queue would mean a wait of several hours for my turn, but I noticed they were still allowing people into the store to browse and purchase records, so in I went and browsed and browsed. At about 3.45pm a table was set up in the middle of the store and nobody suggested I should leave, so I continued browsing.

At around 4.30pm, the band appeared with appropriate security and sat down at the table ready to start signing. It was then I saw a couple of elderly women grab a CD each and go over to the table where they were met by security, saying something to the effect there was a big queue outside and they were not able to jump in.

Frontman Francis Rossi seemed to reply that because they were already there they might as well sign them anyway, prompting me to also grab a CD and stand behind the women at the table. The security man gave me a dirty look and I just responded by saying I was with them and thus got my CD signed by the band straightaway.

As they were signing my CD, I mentioned to Francis that I had been following the band since 1969, which prompted him to get up from his chair, lean over the table and shake my hand, expressing his appreciation. It was all rather dignified with few people in the store and the queue still outside. Not only was I able to get my CD signed by all the band, I had the bonus of a handshake and a few words with Francis Rossi, all before the impending chaos which would ensue when the queue was eventually let in. As I left, I could see the queue outside had grown considerably and didn't envy the time it might take those patient people to get their turn.

The local newspaper later reported on the event and stated that the first people in the queue had been there for seven hours and showed some pictures of the crowds of fans inside the store. This must be a case of making the most of opportunities which are presented to you.

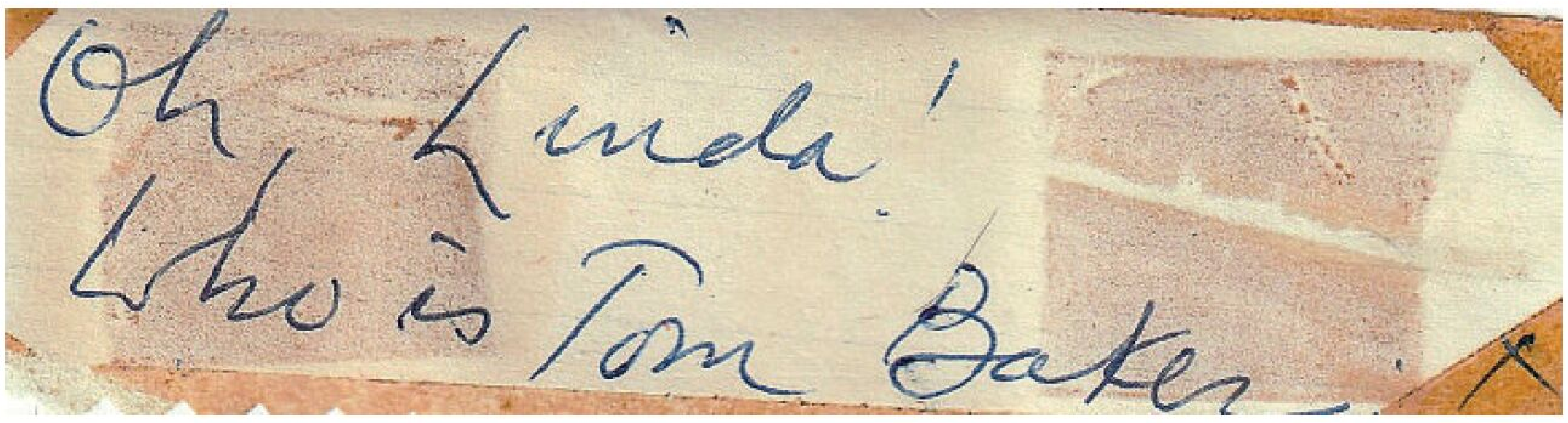


The Railway in Ipswich hosted Status Quo as part of their Under the Influence tour of pubs around the UK and beyond

Who is Tom Baker?

Linda Soper of New Southgate, London remembers:

I have always been a fan of the actor Tom Baker. The reason I like him is I love his voice – so melodious – and those blue eyes. Since I did acting myself, I was trying to strive to achieve the mellifluousness to get this in my own voice. His voice seemed to have so many tones and layers to it. I wanted to meet him in real life, to see if he lived up to all I thought he was, but I didn't know how I was going to achieve this.



Oh Linda!
Who is Tom Baker

> **"I happened to look on the platform and I saw this really tall man with a really long scarf."**

I first noticed him in the 1971 film Nicholas and Alexandra playing Grigori Rasputin, the mystic healer who befriended the Russian royal family. Rasputin was a favourite at the court of Tsar Nicolas II and his wife, Alexandra, due to stopping the bleeding of their son who had haemophilia. I thought Tom was outstanding in the role.

I also had a love of science fiction and fantasy. When he starred in The Golden Voyage of Sinbad (1973), I loved it. I enjoyed the way his character turned into the evil Prince Koura. His eyes looked hypnotic as he was playing the part, and I thought the animation and effects were brilliant and the monsters amazing. I just wanted the film to go on forever.

NIKOLAUS
UND
ALEXANDRA
EIN SAM SPIEGEL-
FRANKLIN J. SCHAFFNER PRODUKTION
EIN HORIZON FILM DER COLUMBIA FILM

Linda first noticed Tom Baker when he played Rasputin in the 1971 film Nicholas and Alexandra. Top: Linda will cherish Tom Baker's autograph always.

I found him so interesting and read up about him. Tom was brought up in a poor area of Liverpool where his ambitions were very down to earth – though a couple were very unusual as he wanted a wooden leg and to be an orphan. Instead of these, he became a monk before leaving and doing National Service. When he came out, he found work on a building site. But he also started acting in the theatre, before moving on to films.

During this time, he wrote off to the BBC as he heard Jon Pertwee was leaving Doctor Who. The producers had seen Tom in The Golden Voyage of Sinbad, and he got the part of the Doctor on the strength of that. He went on to play the Doctor for seven years (1974-1981) and had a few companions, the first of which was Sarah Jane Smith played by the late Elisabeth Sladen.

I didn't think I would ever actually meet him and then, one Saturday, I went with my mum and dad to pick up my sister from London Euston as she returned from a trip to north Wales. When I was having a coffee, I happened to look on the platform and I saw this really tall man with a really long scarf.

My eyes widened and butterflies danced around in my stomach. I said to my parents: "There's Doctor Who." He was easily over 6ft, whereas I was under 5ft. Isn't it funny, when you meet anyone, and when you have planned what to say, no words came out. My mind went blank. He turned and got on to the train and I followed him. When he sat down, his eyes were so blue.

I blurted out: "Are you Doctor Who?" "What's your name?" he said smiling, his voice so beautiful. "Linda." With that he gave me his autograph. When I looked down, he'd written in his autograph to me: "Oh Linda! Who is Tom Baker?" I left him smiling, but I didn't want to leave. He was one person I didn't think I would ever meet, but I was so happy. I would have liked to have chatted to him more but I didn't want to get left on the train.

A few years later, I noticed Tom had written his autobiography and had named it: Who on Earth is Tom Baker? Of course, I bought the book and loved the determination, injected with humour, and how he eventually got into the acting profession, after doing other jobs to keep things afloat. It covers both his early years and the years he was Britain's most famous Time Lord and it won't disappoint you.

I still have the autograph and will cherish it always.

Wheels of Fortune

Sue Cawte of Ilford, Essex remembers:

In my teens, I used to look at car drivers and wish I had my own set of wheels. I envied the freedom they had, being able to jump in their car and go wherever they wanted without having to rely on public transport. I was very lucky, though, as I didn't have to rely on public transport that much due to my dad always being happy to give me a lift somewhere or pick me up of an evening. But even though I had the free "Dad's taxi" service, I still yearned to be independent and have my own car.

Instead of moaning about it, I took action and, when I was 17, I used my part-time retail job's salary to pay for weekly driving lessons. It was quite a big chunk of my earnings but I felt it was definitely worth it. After a year of lessons, which resulted in two failed tests, I was beginning to give up hope of ever passing. But I decided to persist, and, on my third test, I was lucky to have an instructor who was very relaxed which resulted in me being relaxed and passing my test. I was overjoyed when I passed, and all of my family and friends were delighted for me.

By now, I was working full-time and earning a fairly good salary, so decided to buy my first car. I didn't have enough to buy it outright, so I got one on finance with my dad kindly putting himself down as a guarantor. I decided on a secondhand 1.1 litre small red Rover. It wasn't flash by any means, and it didn't have power steering or even a radio but I didn't care as it would be my own set of wheels which is all that mattered to me.

A couple of weeks later, I had got used to driving my car and drove it around with ease. I loved no longer having to rely on my dad for lifts and enjoyed being able to give my mum a lift at times when she wanted picking up from shopping at the local shopping centre.

> **"I'm pleased that I stuck to my guns and kept pursuing my dream of owning my own set of wheels."**

A few years later, disaster struck when I had my first car accident. I was approaching a roundabout and looking to my right, I could see there was absolutely no traffic and proceeded to drive forward. However, after turning back to look ahead I was, dumbfounded to see the car in front was stationary. I tried to brake but it was too late, and my car went into the back of the one in front, causing significant damage.

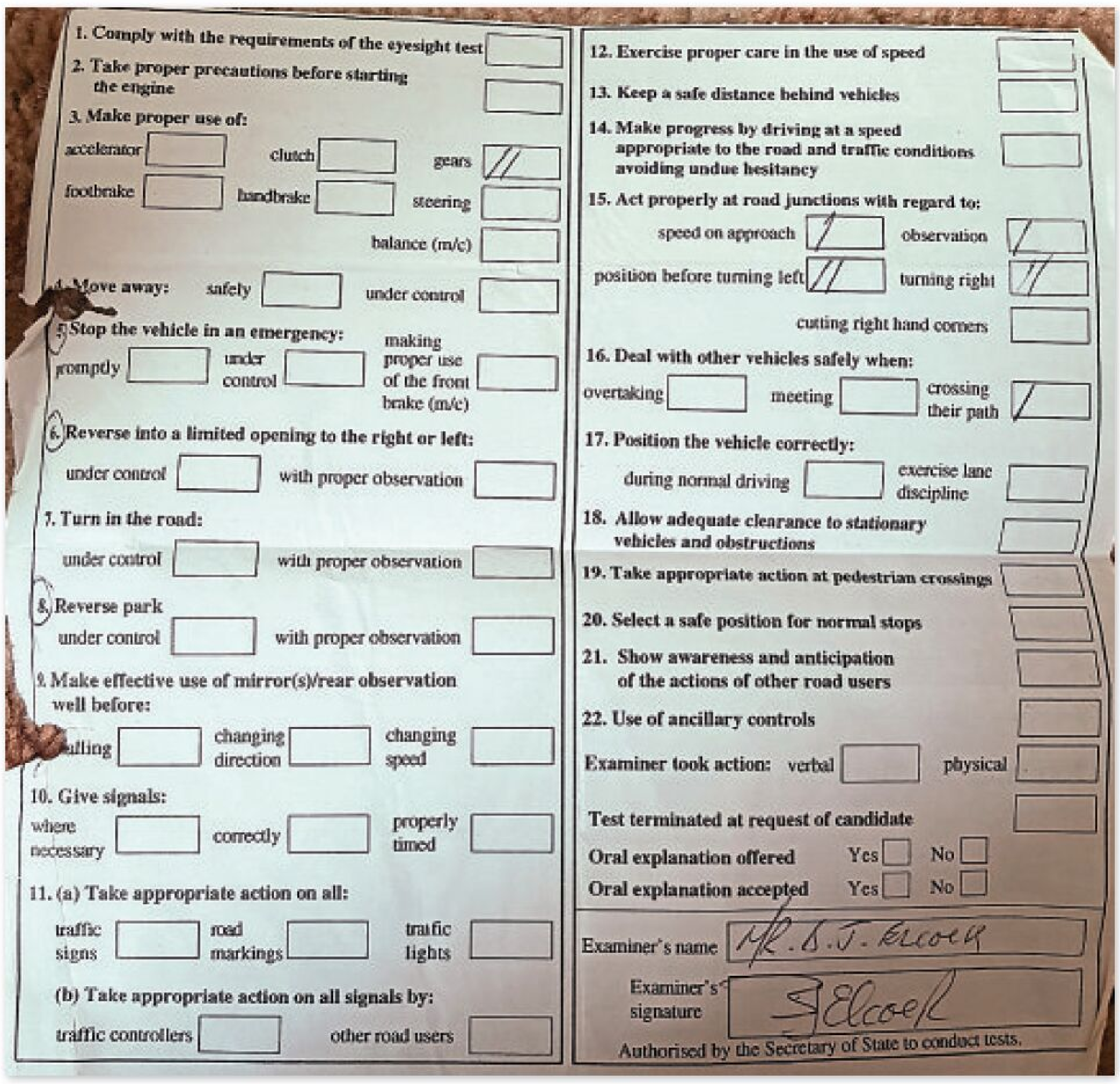
The accident shook me up as it was the first time I'd experienced anything like this and was mortified at the distress I'd caused the driver in front of me. It took me a while to get my confidence back and enjoy driving again but, in time, I did.

Even though I loved driving, there was a negative aspect that occurred. I started driving to work which resulted in my physical exercise dropping drastically. Over time, it made me feel lethargic and lacking in energy. No longer doing the 25-minute walk meant I was getting literally no exercise at all. I didn't want to go back to walking to work as, when I finished in the evening, it would be quite dark and not safe to walk home. I also didn't want to rely on my dad for lifts again now I had my own car.

I did, however, find a suitable solution to get my exercise back on track. I joined a local gym which was open until 8pm and had two hours of free parking for members. I went for 30 minutes after work twice a week and once at the weekend during the daytime. Soon my energy levels were back up and I enjoyed the freedom of having my own car without it affecting my physical fitness.

Over the years, I had a further two car accidents, both of which were not my fault. Nowadays, I think it is more important than ever to have your own car as it isn't safe to walk in the evenings, so I'm pleased that I stuck to my guns and kept pursuing my dream of owning my own set of wheels. Driving still gives me so much pleasure and I love the convenience of it.

When there are so many stresses in the modern era, why add to it with commutes on public transport?



1. Comply with the requirements of the eyesight test ☐
2. Take proper precautions before starting the engine ☐
3. Make proper use of:
accelerator ☐ clutch ☐ gears ☐ //
footbrake ☐ handbrake ☐ steering ☐
balance (m/c) ☐
4. Move away: safely ☐ under control ☐
5. Stop the vehicle in an emergency:
romptly ☐ under control ☐ making proper use of the front brake (m/c) ☐
6. Reverse into a limited opening to the right or left:
under control ☐ with proper observation ☐
7. Turn in the road:
under control ☐ with proper observation ☐
8. Reverse park
under control ☐ with proper observation ☐
9. Make effective use of mirror(s)/rear observation well before:
alling ☐ changing direction ☐ changing speed ☐
10. Give signals:
where necessary ☐ correctly ☐ properly timed ☐
11. (a) Take appropriate action on all:
traffic signs ☐ road markings ☐ traffic lights ☐
(b) Take appropriate action on all signals by:
traffic controllers ☐ other road users ☐
12. Exercise proper care in the use of speed ☐
13. Keep a safe distance behind vehicles ☐
14. Make progress by driving at a speed appropriate to the road and traffic conditions avoiding undue hesitancy ☐
15. Act properly at road junctions with regard to:
speed on approach ☐ / observation ☐ /
position before turning left ☐ // turning right ☐ //
cutting right hand corners ☐
16. Deal with other vehicles safely when:
overtaking ☐ meeting ☐ crossing their path ☐ /
17. Position the vehicle correctly:
during normal driving ☐ exercise lane discipline ☐
18. Allow adequate clearance to stationary vehicles and obstructions ☐
19. Take appropriate action at pedestrian crossings ☐
20. Select a safe position for normal stops ☐
21. Show awareness and anticipation of the actions of other road users ☐
22. Use of ancillary controls ☐
Examiner took action: verbal ☐ physical ☐
Test terminated at request of candidate ☐
Oral explanation offered Yes ☐ No ☐
Oral explanation accepted Yes ☐ No ☐
Examiner's name MR. S. J. ELCOCK
Examiner's signature SJ Elcock
Authorised by the Secretary of State to conduct tests.

Sue was overjoyed to pass her driving test at the third attempt and all her family and friends were delighted for her.

Looking for Jean-Paul

Sharon Haston of Falkirk, Stirlingshire remembers:

The first words I remember learning in French were: "Jean-Paul est dans le jardin" ("Jean-Paul is in the garden"). Very interesting maybe, but not helpful if you want to order a coffee. It was 1978 and I'd just started high school. I'd been to see Grease at the cinema three times and my favourite television shows were Happy Days and Little House on the Prairie.

Jean-Paul was the son in the family who appeared in our first-year study book. It was picture book which told stories about the family in various situations. A bit like the comic strip stories in my favourite Jackie magazine but not as interesting. There was Maman, Papa, Jean-Paul, Marie-France, and Claudette.

I loved learning French. It was new and different. We had a small vocab book in which we wrote all the new words we learned and their English meaning. We covered our jotters with brown paper or leftover wallpaper. I think the idea was to keep them pristine. I'm not sure if it worked.

Our school was very small, so we didn't have anything as exotic and high-tech as a language lab like some of the larger schools in the area. Sometimes, we'd listen to people speaking on cassette tapes and repeat the phrases they said to practise our pronunciation. I remember the voice telling us to "ecouter et repeater" – listen and repeat.

Our teachers were fantastic. Mr Moir had a great sense of humour, but when I think back, he spoke French mostly with a broad Scottish accent. Mrs Davenport was one of the younger teachers. She was very modern and glamorous and always made lessons fun. She looked a little like Toni Basil who sang the song Mickey.

We had the option of taking German lessons in the second year and I took it. This was partly because I enjoyed learning French, and partly because it got me out of some PE classes, particularly those involving cross-country running. Mrs Davenport took our German classes. She gave us all a German name. Mine was Sabine. At the end of the school year, before we broke up for the holidays, she organised a German party for us. We'd eat German food like salami, pumpernickel, sauerkraut and pretzels. This was before Lidl supermarkets appeared in the UK, so it was always exciting trying to find these items in our local supermarket.

Sometimes, we'd have a visit from a German or French student. These would be university students, probably intending to teach English back home. They'd come for a few weeks and take a few of our classes, helping us to practise speaking French or German.

In those days, in Scotland, our exams were called O-grades and you received A, B or C as a pass. D or E was a fail. I received As for both French and German O-grades, so went on to take the next set of exams called Highers. I got a B for the Highers.

I enjoyed French so much that I took a certificate in sixth year studies next. This meant reading the French versions of Jean-Paul Sartre's Huis Clos, Georges Simenon's Maigret and answering questions on them. Looking back, I don't know how I did it. So, after all those years of studying French and German, am I fluent when I go on holiday to these countries? Sadly, no. It is a case of use it or lose it, I'm afraid. When we're there I let my husband, Robert, who only took French up to second year, attempt the talking as I'm a bit too shy to try.

Talking of Robert, we got together on our school trip to Saint-Cast-le-Guildo in Brittany. As the song goes, I was Sixteen Going on Seventeen. It was during the Easter holidays in 1982. Our parents waved us off from the school and the bus took an eternity to travel to Southampton. The ferry crossing was rough. I was OK, but poor Robert was very sick.

Five of our teachers came with us, which was good of them to do during their own holidays. We had a fabulous time despite the hotel being a total dump and encountering the horrors of being served cheval (horse) for our dinner. We've always wanted to return to that area but haven't made it so far. It would be a real trip down memory lane.

Perhaps I could even brush up on my rusty French and practise speaking it. I just need to find that book where I can read about Jean-Paul being in the jardin. Has anyone still got a copy?

Left: Sharon's French class of 1982, the year they were sitting their O-grades. Sharon is on the extreme right of front row, in the pink jumper. Right: Sharon with her now husband Robert on the school trip, where they first got together.

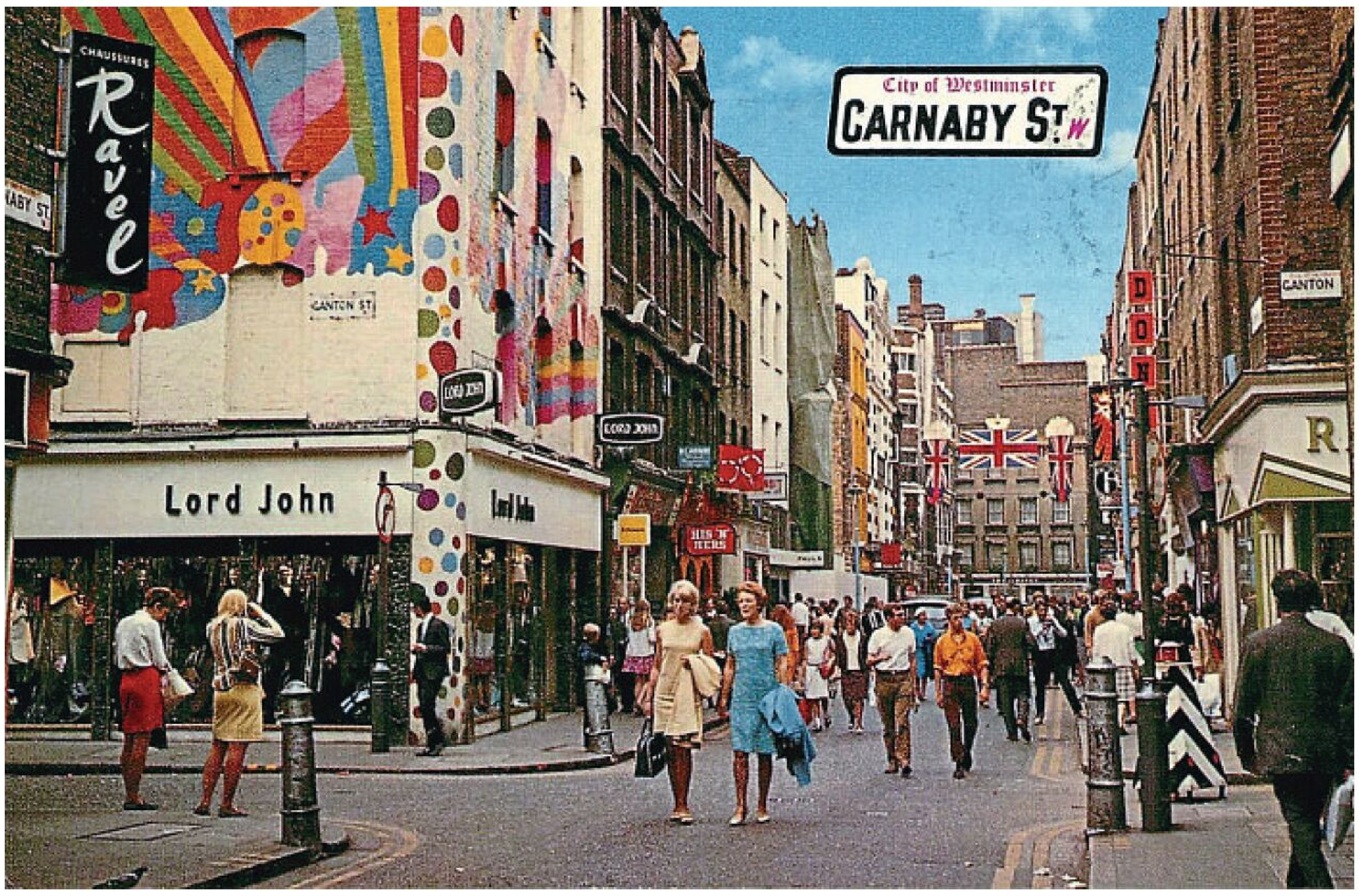
That London

Bob Cooper of Macclesfield, Cheshire remembers:

In my early 20s, I had the chance to go to London for the first time with Ian, a work colleague. It was just a day out, spending about seven hours there, travelling by train from Liverpool Lime Street. We managed to cover several of the main sights including Trafalgar Square, Buckingham Palace and the Tower of London but unfortunately the whole day was marred with continual drizzle.

This was only a taster as I decided to go down a couple of years later for longer, particularly to visit Carnaby Street in the heart of "swinging" London. Lord John was the first shop I can remember and there was also a branch opened in Liverpool. By then the British beat group scene had exploded around the country and even across the world.

When I announced to my mother that I was going there for a week she was not impressed. "I don't know why you've got to go to 'that London' for," she said. "Isn't that where the Rolling Stones live?" My parents were conditioned to hearing Ruby Murray, Doris Day, Dickie Valentine and Frankie Vaughan and other easy listening stars. They had not yet adapted to the new pop culture, but the Beatles, being from Liverpool, were more acceptable to them than Mick and co.



Bob visited Lord John on Carnaby Street, the heart of "swinging" London.

That trip set me off on a lifelong love of the big city and I have had so many wonderful experiences there while making friends along the way. One of my Welsh friends, Michael Holden, moved to Wimbledon, so I spent a few holidays there. He became an actor, appearing in Please Sir! and other 1970s television programmes. His main role was in Alan Garner's The Owl Service which was shown in six episodes on ITV. Mike was quite outrageous, and one incident was reported in the press. Some people had witnessed seeing a Womble running around Wimbledon common. It turned to be Mike in one of his mad moments.

From Wimbledon, we went into the West End to watch plays and musicals like A Little Night Music. We only managed to get seats in the gallery, which felt like scaling Mount Everest (the air was very thin up there and pick axes could be hired for a fee). Afterwards, we met Hermione Gingold backstage who played Madame Armfeldt and she was quite formidable, I must say. Watching Miss Saigon, with a real helicopter whirring and hovering over the audience, was mind-blowing and so unexpected. Les Misérables was equally satisfying in a different way and has remained one of my favourite shows ever.

Being a lifelong fan of Petula Clark, I saw her first time in London in The Sound of Music in the West End in 1981, which was rather different to Julie Andrews' film portrayal. Two years later, I travelled down to see her 40th anniversary concert at the Royal Albert Hall and was able to meet and chat to her afterwards. When she starred in Sunset Boulevard, I attended an afternoon performance and after the show she came to the stage door in full costume and signed autographs. She explained that it took too long to apply her stage makeup, so she remained in character all day.

Agnetha&
Benny&
Björn&
Anni-Frid.

Two years ago, Bob travelled to see the thoroughly exciting Abba Voyage.

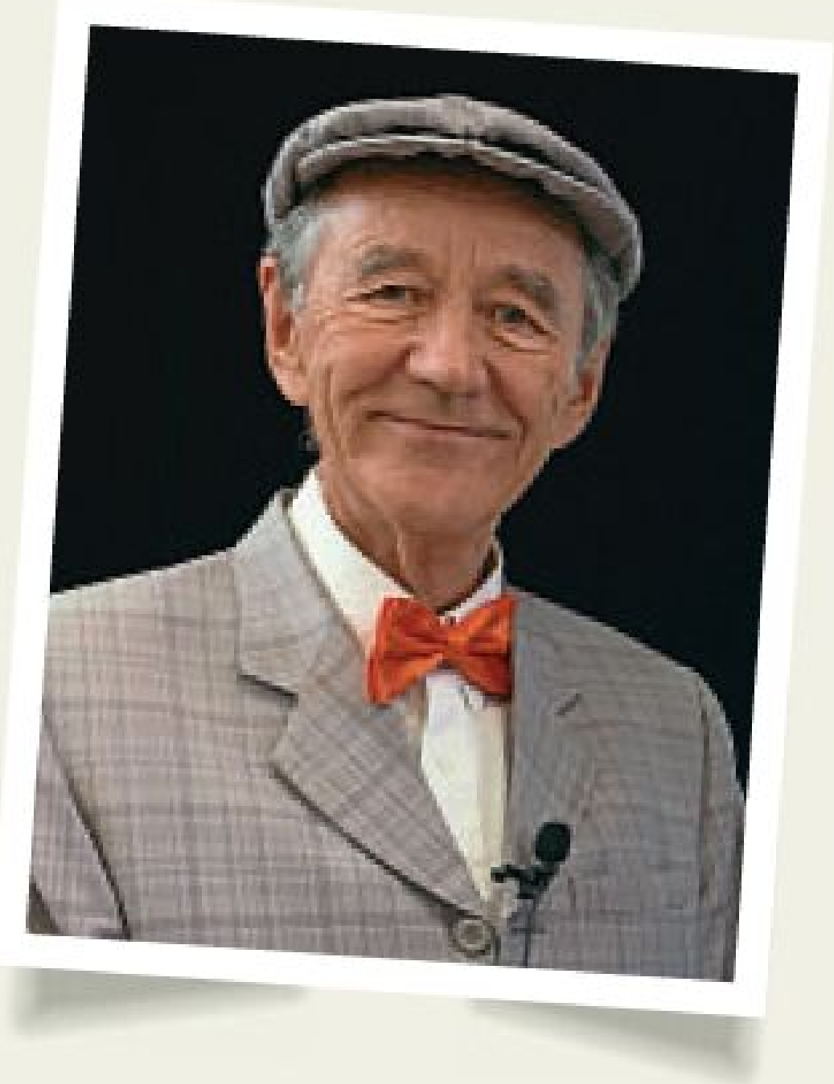
Over the years, I have seen a string of shows and concerts in London. I remember the Edwin Hawkins Singers at the Hammersmith Apollo soon after Oh Happy Day was released and their sheer exuberance brought the house down.

When David Essex first found fame, he was appearing in Godspell in the West End. Several others in the cast went on to great success such as Marti Webb, Gay Soper and Jeremy Irons but David suddenly became a huge pop star with Rock On being his first major hit. I went to that show and the audience were allowed to meet the cast during the interval but David was the only one missing.

In later years, my favourite show at the Royal Albert Hall was Björn Ulvaeus and Benny Andersson's Swedish musical Kristina från Duvemåla (Kristina from Duvemåla) which starred Russell Watson and Helen Sjöholm in an English version. This was only ever performed twice: once at Carnegie Hall, New York followed by the Royal Albert Hall straight afterwards. Five minutes before the show began, Björn and Benny crept into the auditorium unannounced and got the most amazing standing ovation I have ever known, lasting approximately eight minutes. I managed to get a signed poster which has taken pride of place in my hall ever since.

Two years ago, I travelled down to see Abba Voyage and this has to be the most exciting experience ever for me. Unbelievably realistic, it was totally worth the train fares, accommodation and admission fee to see such a wonderful event in "that London". A must see for everyone.

On the Right Wavelength



Alan Naber of Perth, Western Australia, Australia remembers:

In the 1940s, my little world revolved around Mummy – my protector, my censor, my guiding light. However, on starting school, I found a wider world, and was introduced to something different. Mummy and I were no longer on the same wavelength. Much to Mummy's distaste, I asked to buy the weekly editions of popular comics The Beano and The Dandy. The characters intrigued me, I envied their courage to step out of my confined world.

What mischief had Dennis the Menace got up to this week? I longed to see if he outwitted his teacher yet again. Had Desperate Dan used his brawn to save the world from disaster? Mummy, however, had other ideas. Such decadent publications were only for the lower classes. We were middle class, she said. All was not lost, however, as I was allowed one concession to the world of comics: The Eagle, a more intellectual publication approved of by Mummy as it was edited by an Anglican cleric, the Rev Marcus Morris.

At school, away from my censor, I could sneak a look at my classmates' weekly Beano and Dandy and my sensitive naivety was surprised to see Desperate Dan consuming vast quantities of beef pies when we still had food rationing. He then used his strength to overpower and hurt wild animals, much to my distress. Roger the Dodger was my favourite as he managed to get out of most of his schoolwork.

The weekly Eagle had lots of interesting things to keep me enthralled, however, with upper-class comic strips, stories and technical articles. There was Dan Dare, "Pilot of the Future", who looked very wise when smoking his pipe, wore a yellow space suit and usually outwitted the Mekon. In the middle pages was a cutaway drawing of some fantastic machine: the latest racing car, the Vanwall; a new jet plane, the Comet; or a giant railway steam engine, Mallard, which reached 126mph. Wow! How I dreamed of being an engine driver.

What really got me hooked, however, were the instructions to make things. My first project was a balsawood model boat, cut out with scissors and glued together with sweet-smelling glue that made me dizzy. On its first outing, the boat sank, was not retrievable so I went off boat building.

The next thing that captivated me was how to make a crystal set – a primitive radio that needs no batteries, just gets one station and needs headphones to hear. Having my own radio and listening in bed seemed real magic. The secret of the crystal set was the cat's whisker. This was the forerunner of today's electronics and consisted of a small piece of germanium crystal with a sharp wire touching it. The wire is waggled by a knob until the correct connection is made and the radio sound is found.

To construct a crystal set, I needed some basic electronic bits: a few metres of thin wire, the cardboard centre of a toilet roll, a cat's whisker or diode, a variable capacitor, a bit of wood and some screws, headphones (from an army surplus store), aerial wire, insulators, and an old water pipe.

The technical bits I got from a small mail-order catalogue supplier called Radiospares, now known as RS Components. I wound the wire around the toilet roll to make the tuning coil and everything was fixed to the wood with the screws.

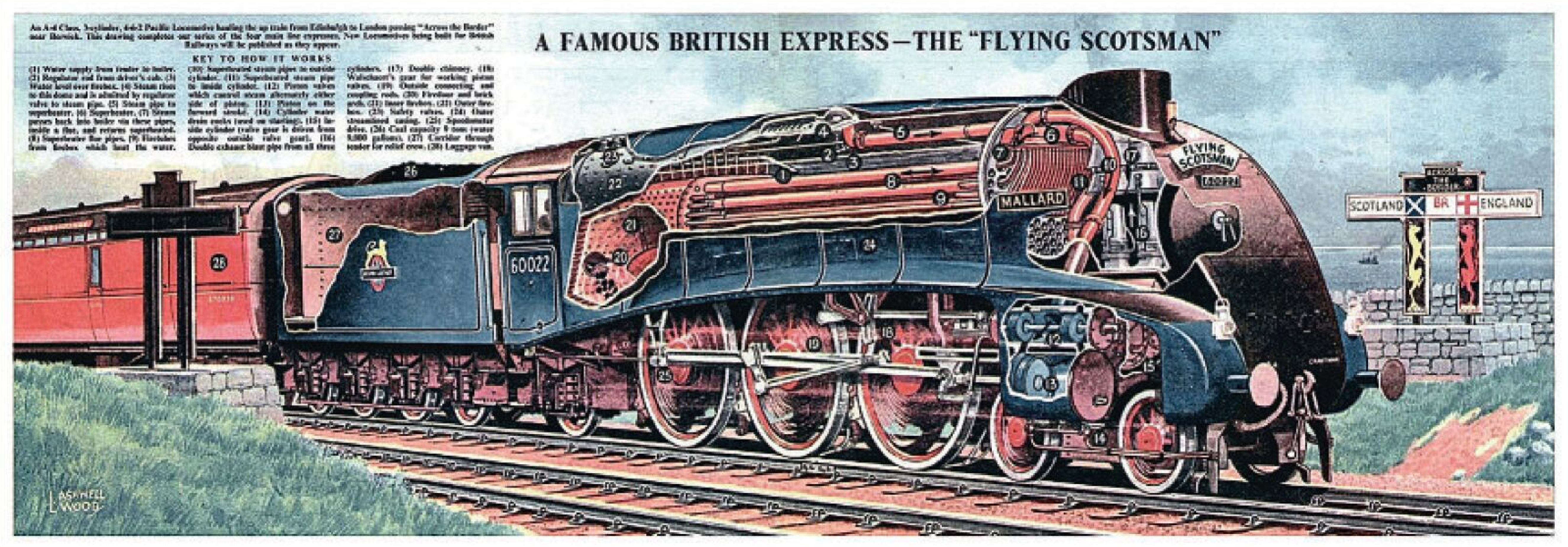
It would not work by just connecting the headphones as it needed a large aerial to get the radio signal.

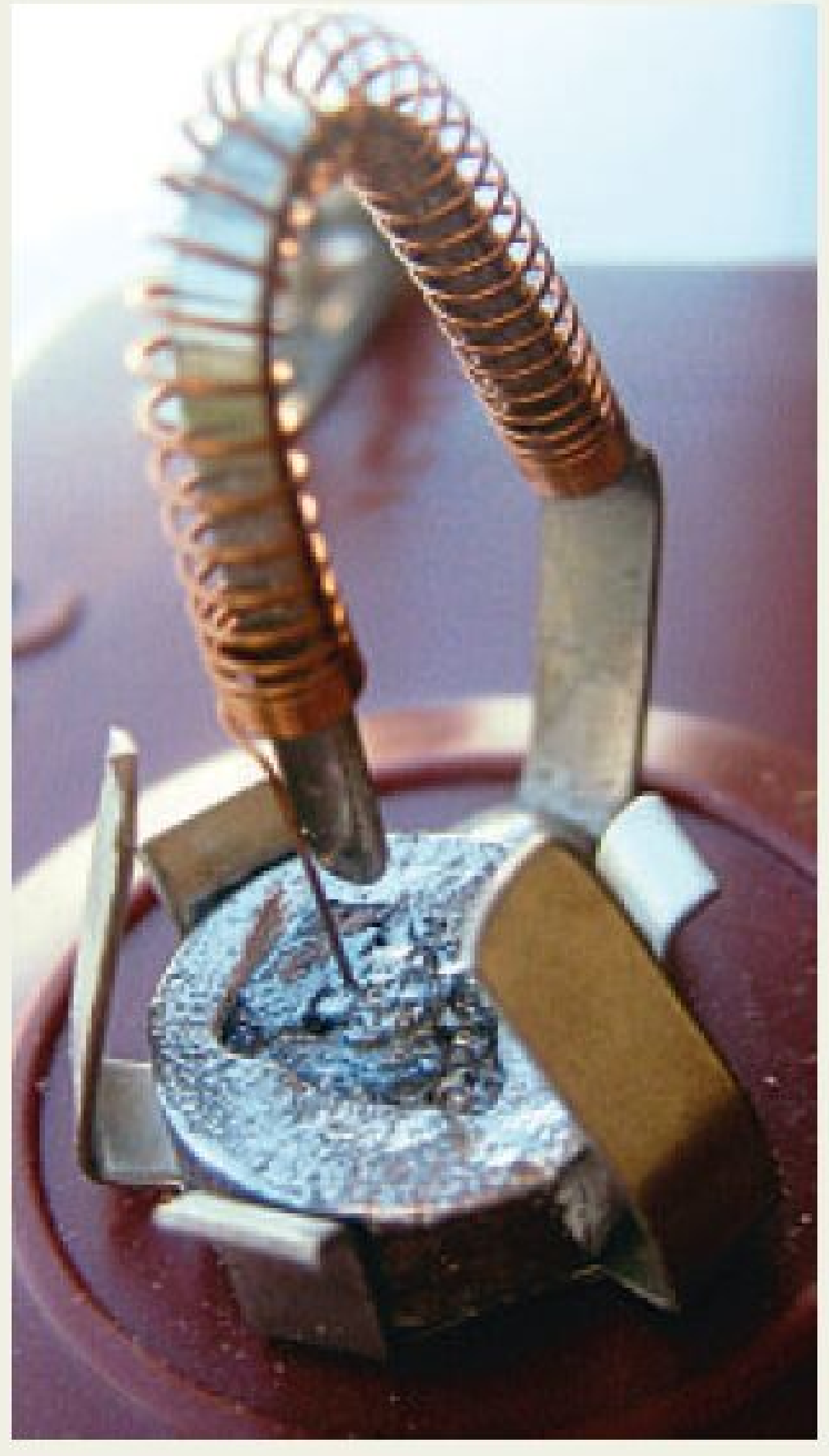
This is where the assistance of my dad came in. A three-metre length of water pipe was fixed upright to the end of the washing line and an insulator held a long wire. The other end of the wire of around 50ft long went in through the window of my upstairs bedroom.

The magic moment came when I connected it all up, waggled the cat's whisker and turned the knob on the variable capacitor. After a little adjustment, it worked. I could faintly hear the BBC Home Service but nothing else.

Lying in bed I listened to The Day of the Triffids or Journey Into Space, often falling asleep with my headphones on to be woken by the radio station starting up again at 5am. Later, I found another article with how to make a crystal set in a matchbox. I made some and sold them to children at school, feeling the real entrepreneur. Then a stroppy dad confronted me saying it did not work, and I had sold his son a dud. I tried to explain that he needed an aerial to get it working but he was not listening, so I gave the money back.

This one-sided confrontation frightened me, and I lost the desire to be an entrepreneur for many years.


A FAMOUS BRITISH EXPRESS—THE "FLYING SCOTSMAN"
KEY TO HOW IT WORKS
FLYING SCOTSMAN
60022
MALLARD
60022
SCOTLAND
BR
ENGLAND



Left: Dreaming of being an engine driver, Alan enjoyed The Eagle with its cutaways of locomotives such as the record-breaking Mallard. Right: The secret of the crystal set was the cat's whisker: a small piece of germanium crystal with a sharp wire touching it.

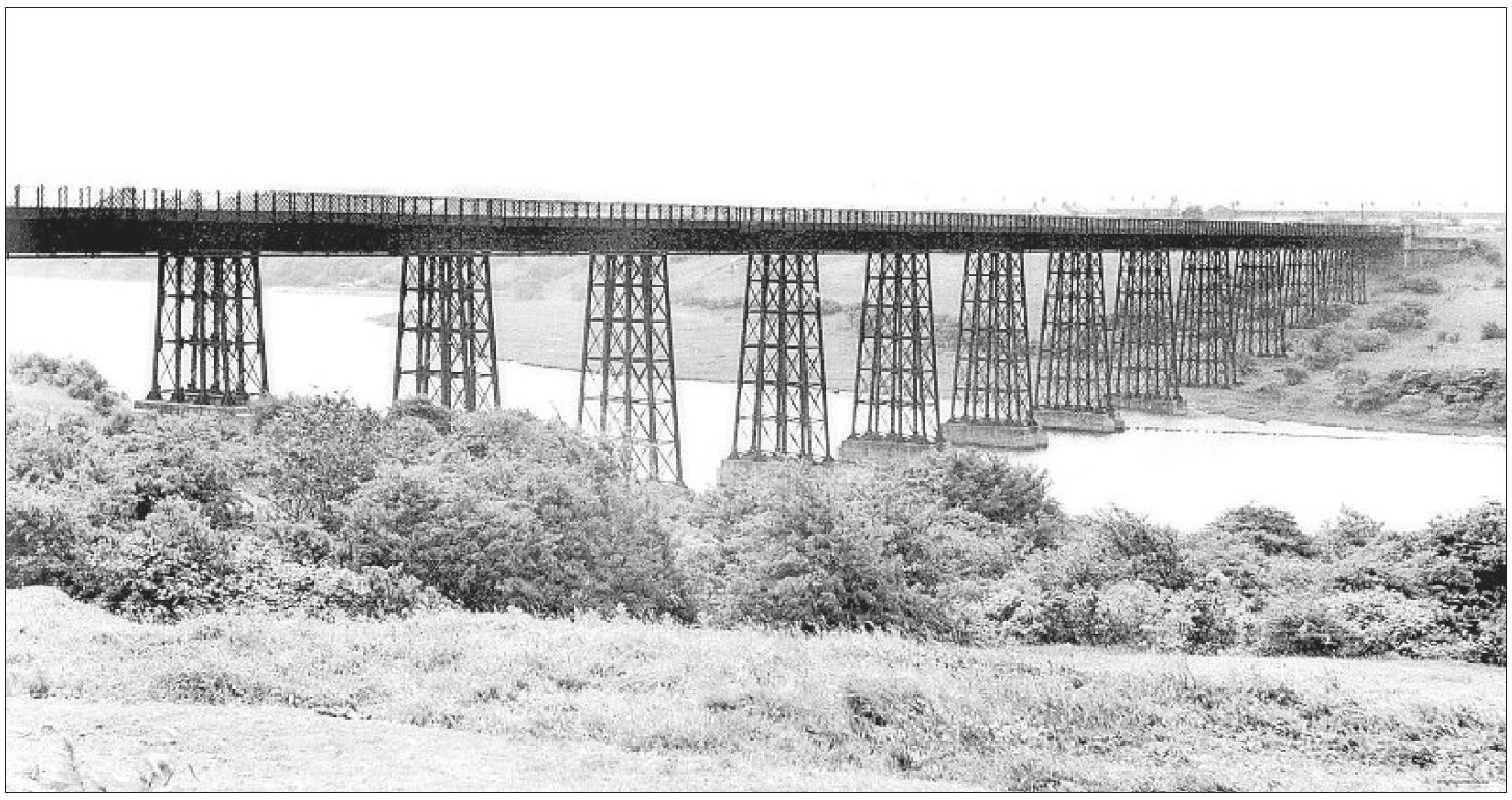
Photograph: Creative Commons/F1jmm

STEAM DAYS

Railway memories from The Francis Frith Collection

The Viaduct, Ashington, Northumberland

(Photograph taken around 1955)



I lived in North Seaton and remember clearly the excitement (and danger), of crossing the bridge by the boards underneath the bridge; especially when the train driver would see us and deliberately let off steam overhead.

Bill Kinnaird

I remember crossing the black bridge on the planks with trains crossing. Scary stuff. I live in Canada now but remember it like it was yesterday.

Paul Mellen

Newton Poppleford, Devon

(Photograph taken around 1955)

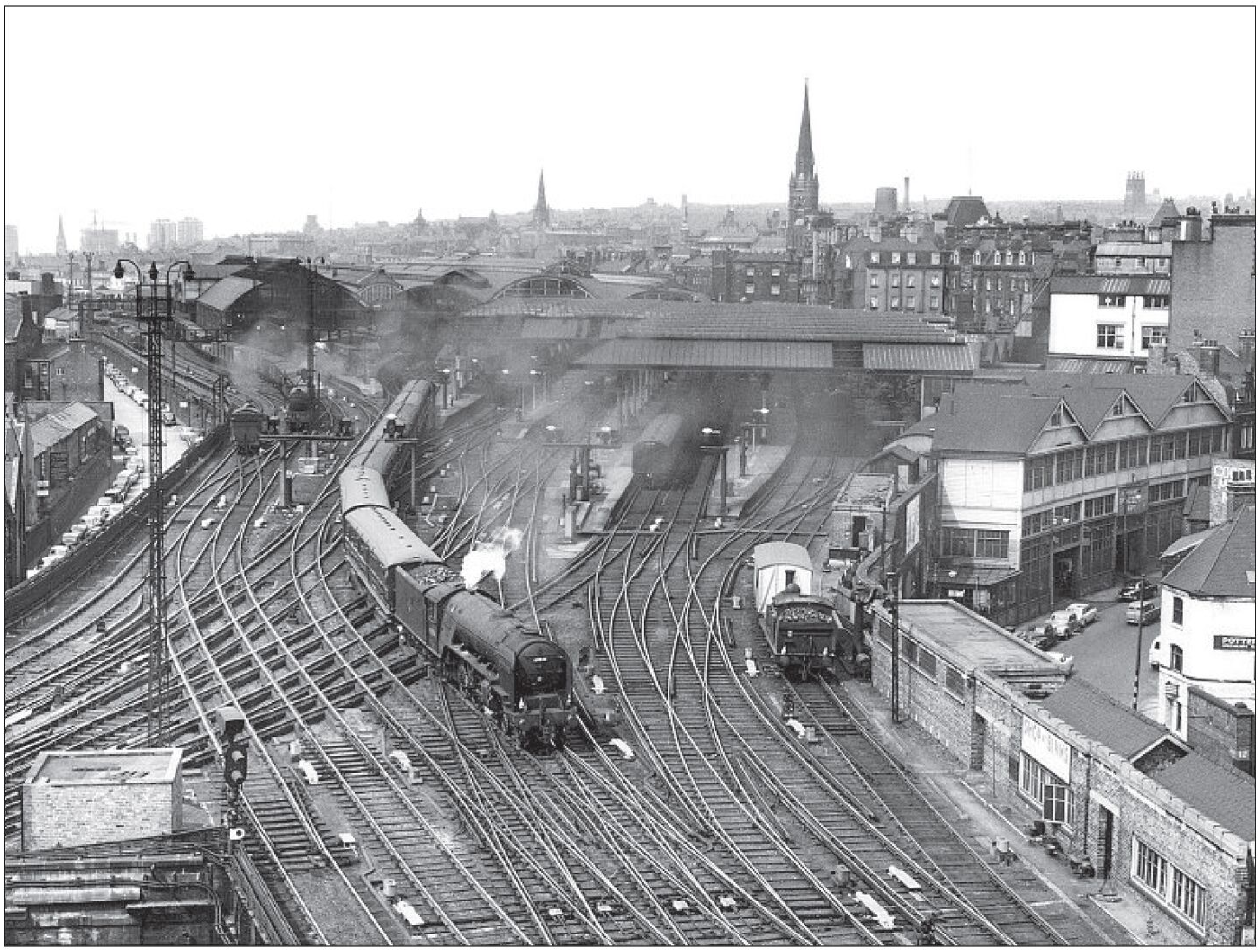
CANNON
ESSEX

My friends and I spent many happy hours playing on the platform and under the old railway bridge before they were both demolished. We used to play hopscotch on the platform and had a camp among the trees at the back. We made a rope swing there and used to take a packed lunch down on school holidays and spend all day there messing about. We had a secret club and had to give a password before you could enter it like children do. The old bridge was shored up with pieces of wood and we would climb up and down it, racing each other to the top.

Diane Ralls

Central Station, Newcastle Upon Tyne

(Photograph taken around 1960)

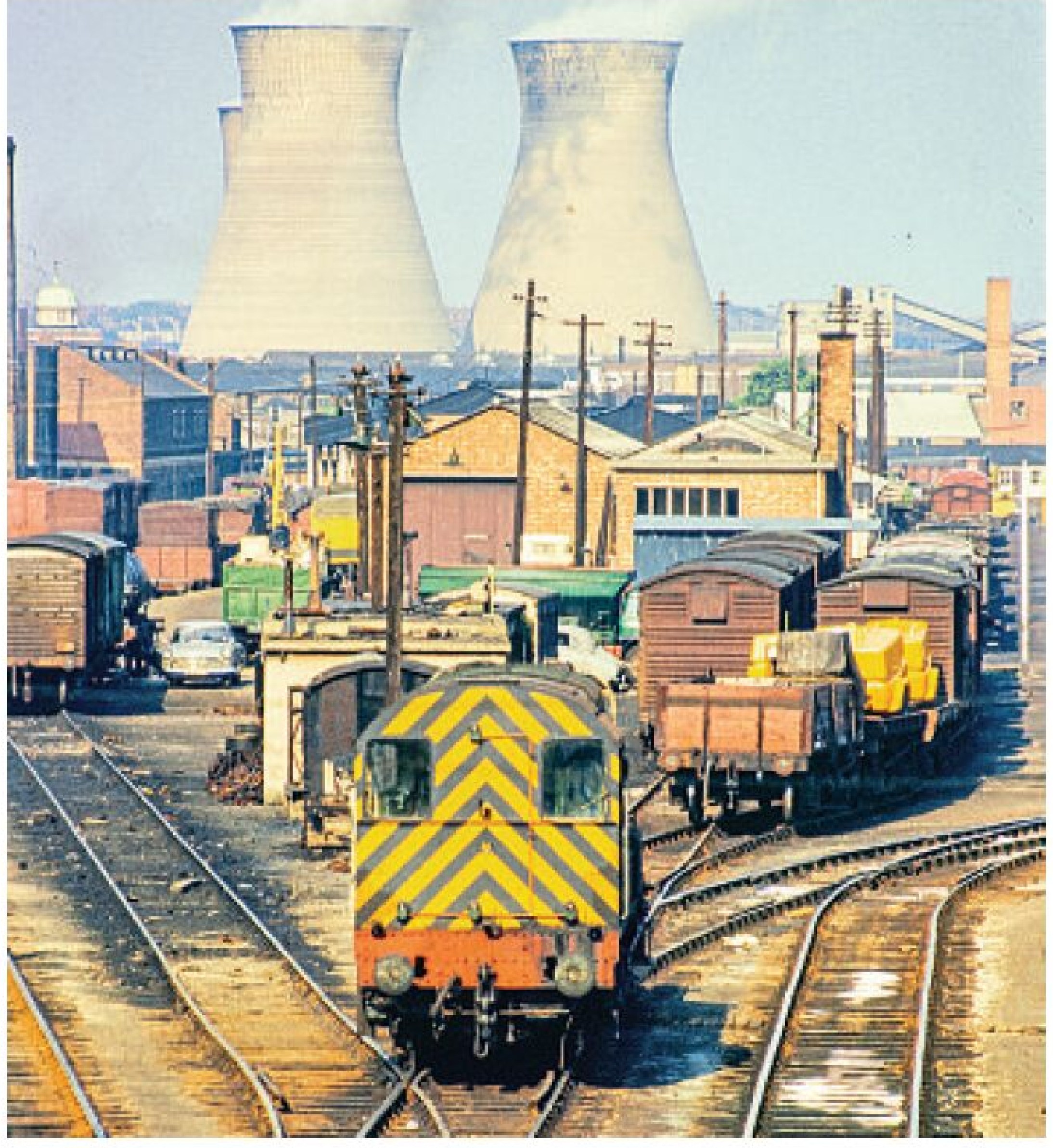


During the bitter winter of 1965, when the railway age of steam was fast diminishing, I worked as a British Transport Commission Police officer (seconded from Newcastle Central railway station's railway police base) at the Tyneside Central Railway Freight Depot. The depot's huge warehouse was freezing cold and windy but a hive of activity with two goods conveyor belts running through it. I remember the hardworking railwaymen – clad in all sorts of winter clothing in an effort to remain warm – constantly unloading wagons and placing goods on the belts. Despite the cold, most of us retained a great sense of humour and got on with our respective jobs.

David Armstrong

Railway Marshalling Yard, Willesden Junction, Greater London

(Photograph taken around 1990)



I started work as an engine cleaner at Old Oak Common in 1973. At that time, steam engines were rapidly being withdrawn and replaced by diesel locomotives. Because of the filthy nature of steam locomotives and everything associated with them, it was almost impossible to recruit staff to work in the engine sheds anywhere in the country. I spent very little time cleaning engines due to an acute shortage of firemen, so I was soon out on the road on the trains. Because I had not progressed through the links and learned how to fire an engine well and maintain steam, I was pretty useless. Many people hold the view that steam engines are wonderful, however, most people who worked on them as an occupation would strongly disagree and I was overjoyed when the steam engines disappeared completely.

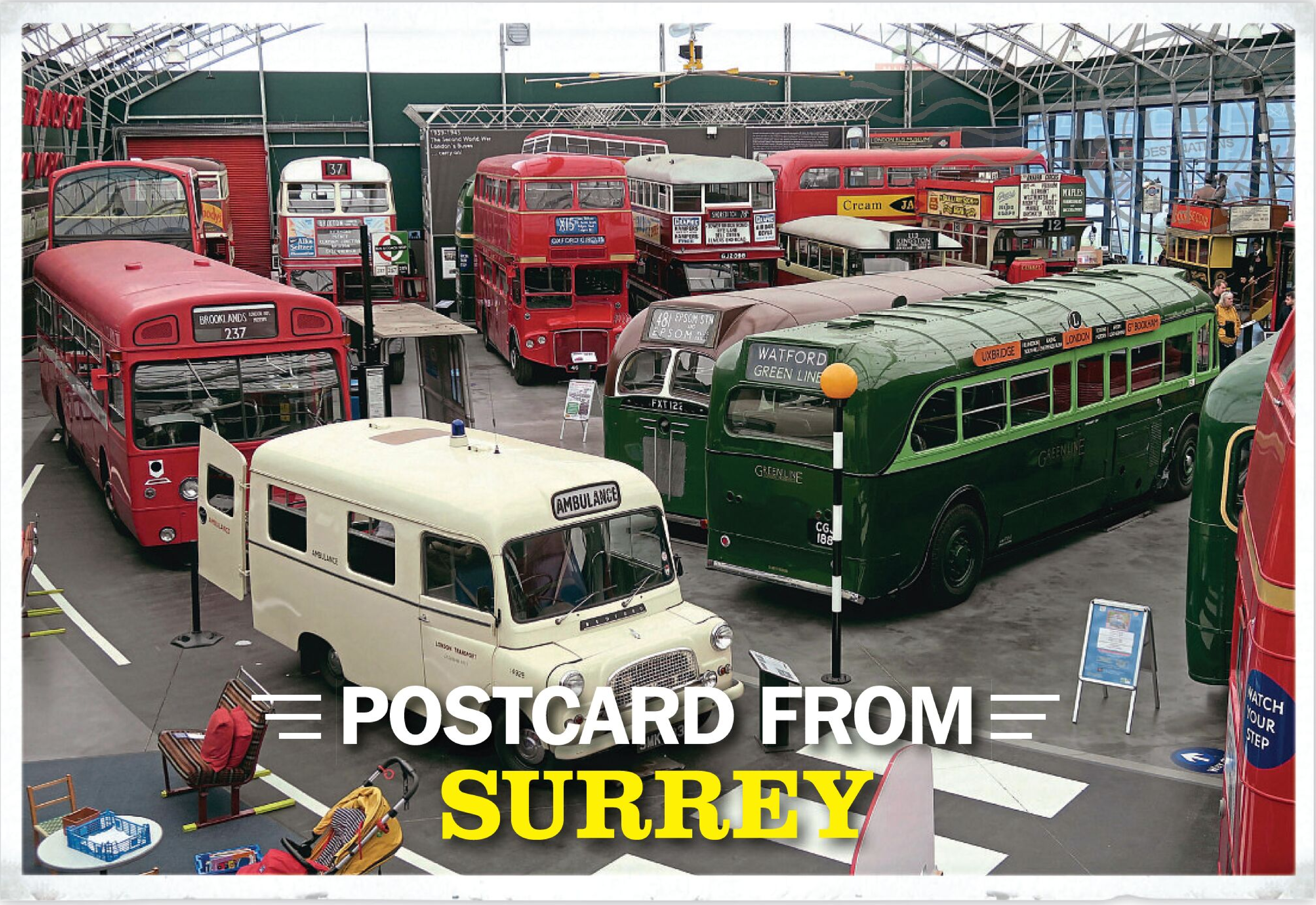
William Brad

The Francis Frith Collection

Over 150 years ago, pioneering Victorian photographer Francis Frith set up his company with the grand plan of photographing all the cities, towns and villages of Britain. His two sons, and later his grandson, continued Frith's massive task, and The Francis Frith Collection now contains more than 360,000 images taken between 1860 and 1970. Over 250,000 images are available to view online. Prints of the Frith photographs, as well as a wide range of other products and local history books, featuring these vintage images, are available from the website francisfrith.com

Share Your Memories

The Francis Frith Collection invites you to visit the website and add memories to the places featured in the photographs, or comment on others already added. Seeing a place from your past can rekindle forgotten or long-held memories. Why not add your story for others to read and enjoy – making your memories and stories part of this growing chronicle of British life?



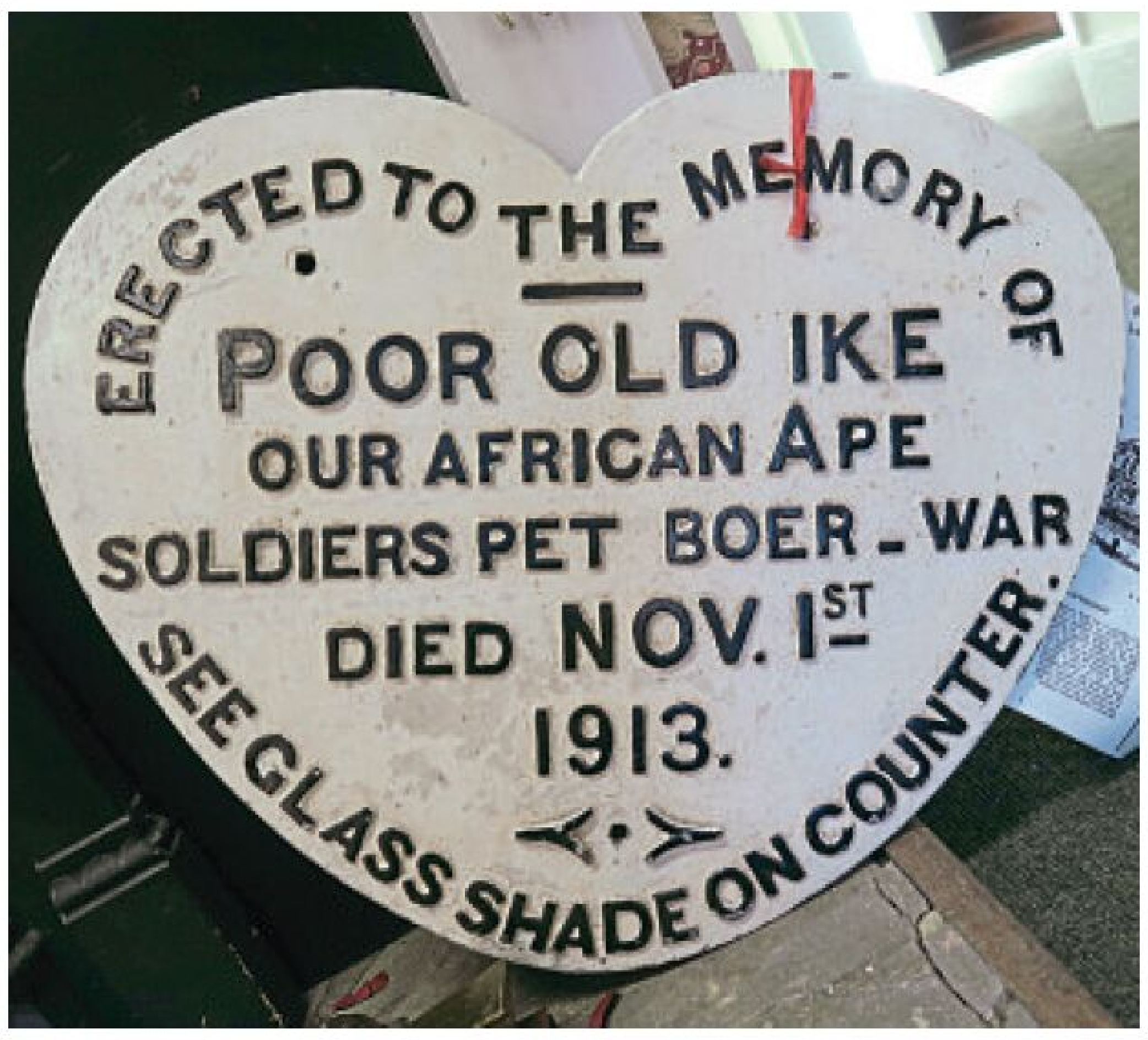
POSTCARD FROM SURREY

Bob Barton finds himself drawn into the secret world of SOE agents and revisits his youth as he admires a vast array of buses

I discovered recently this peaceful county was a hub for the training of secret agents during World War Two. It also boasts the world's largest collection of working London buses and has the earliest memorial to, er, an ape. I mention these random facts because I found them out thanks to Surrey's fascinating – and often quirky – museums. Britain's great "little" museums, of which the county has a wide selection, run mainly thanks to a band of unpaid curators, stewards, walk leaders and talk-givers. So, thank you all.

I find visiting one of these attractions can get me started on a trail of discovery. For example, last spring I paid a return visit to Guildford Museum (01483 518737, surreymuseums.org.uk). It is shoehorned into the gatehouse of the city's castle. An exhibition, Secret Guildford, examined the secret agents of the Special Operations Executive (SOE). These brave men and women operated in enemy-held territory, equipping and training foreign resistance movements in World War Two. I admired artefacts including a suitcase-size radio transmitter used by agents. (Radio operators were at the highest risk of capture while working, with a six-week life expectancy.)

I also learned there were four establishments used by the SOE within 10 miles of Guildford. From 1941, Wanborough Manor became a special training school for the French section of SOE; Winterfold, at Cranleigh, served the same purpose for Belgium and the Netherlands; Gorse Hill was an operational "holding" school and Tyting House (demolished) was the HQ for assessing trainees and agents. A talk about it by a volunteer, in the imposing Guildhall (guildford.gov.uk/Guildhall), revealed more insights. I hadn't realised that a coaching inn, the White Lion (now site of a shopping arcade), was used for meetings of agents and their trainers, while visits to local pubs such as the Good Intent in Puttenham were used to check whether any "careless talk" was done by student agents.



A few months later, I followed up by visiting the leafy village of Wanborough in the lee of the Hog's Back (a feature of the North Downs). It turns out to have a museum specialising in World War Two subterfuge, in a most unusual location – a medieval great barn (from April, wanboroughgreatbarn.co.uk). Members

Top: Bob admired the range of buses spread out around the vast London Bus Museum at Brooklands Museum, Weybridge. Left: The memorial to "Poor Old Ike", the pet ape who died in 1913, spotted by Bob in Caterham's eclectic East Surrey Museum.

Photographs: Bob Barton

Left: The imposing Guildford Guildhall is a landmark in the town's High Street. Right: The 15-mile-long River Wey Navigation once provided the fastest route to London for goods. Below: Artefacts on display at Guildford Museum's exhibition Secret Guildford include a suitcase-size Jedburgh radio transmitter used by Special Operations Executive agents.

of Secret WW2, an educational charity devoted to secret and "behind-the-lines" aspects of the war (secret-ww2.net), were giving talks. I felt as though I was learning "top secret" information myself in this authentic location. The adjacent Wanborough manor house, where agents were put through their paces, can be admired from the outside.

"Honey traps were even set here for trainee agents," said a fellow visitor. "The men were plied with drink and glamorous females employed to try to collect sensitive information. The idea was abandoned as too many agents were falling for the ploy and being expelled." Female agents were also trained and, in many ways, they were more successful than the males.

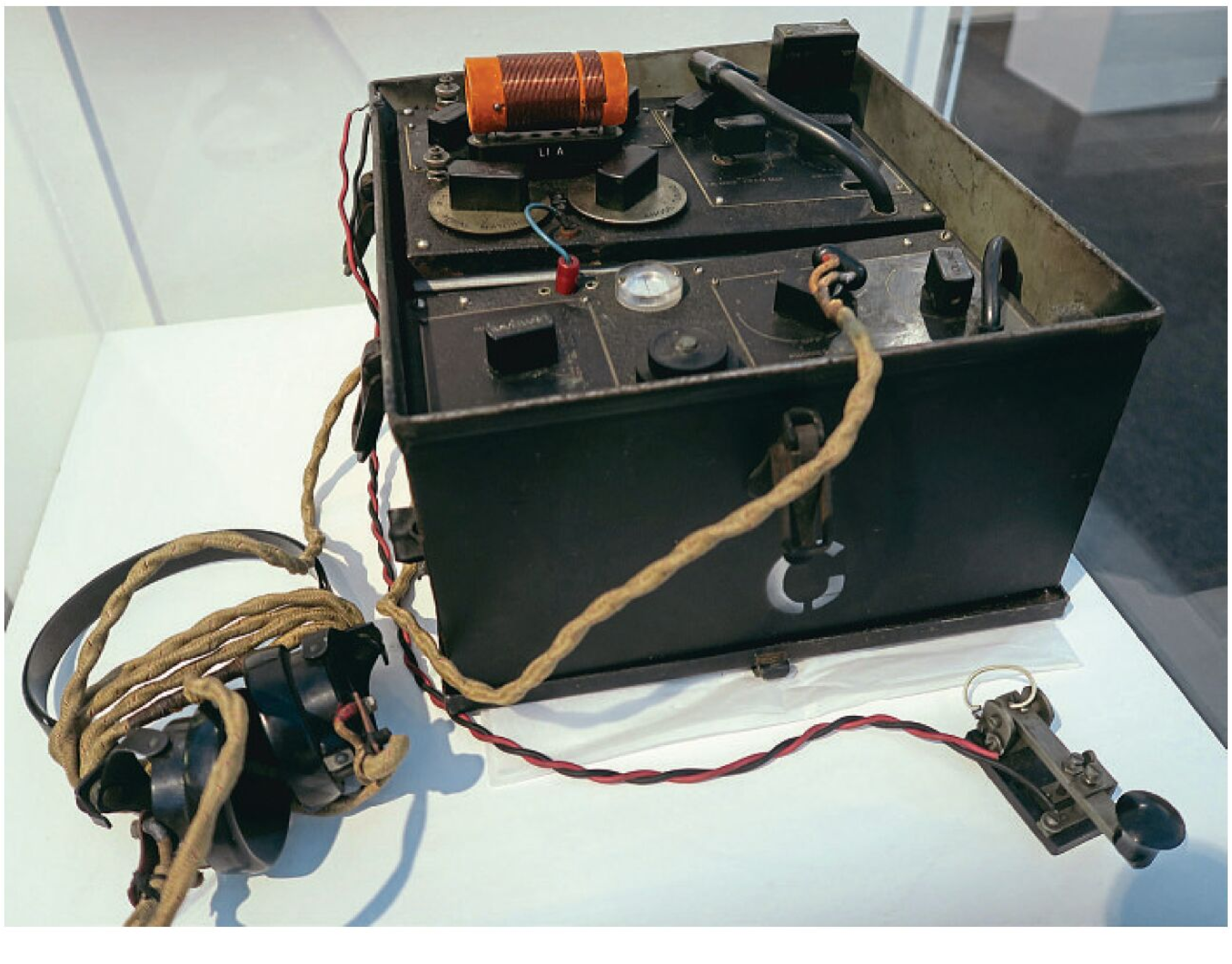
I joined a guided tour of the grounds led by Roger, another volunteer. He was a mine of information, pointing out the cellar entrance where unarmed combat was taught, before leading us into some undergrowth. Between these trees was a shooting range where rookie agents attempted target practice with various types of gun. I inspected a wall pock-marked with bullet holes. Nearby, there's a pit where explosives and various detonators were once demonstrated. "Before you go, visit the Church of Bartholomew – it's the smallest in Surrey and has the first memorial dedicated to the men and women of the SOE."

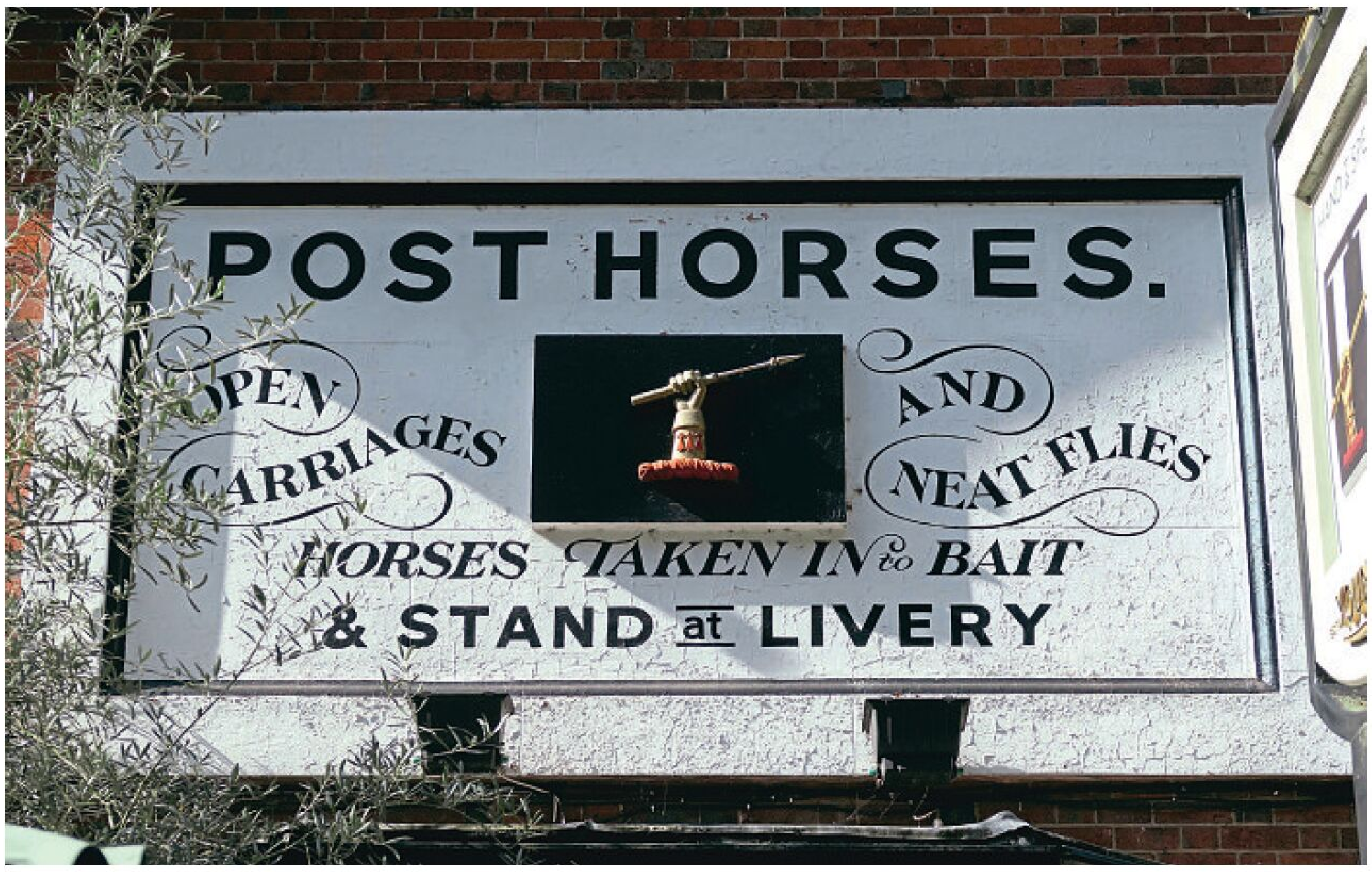
If this barn is among the simplest of museums, the county's largest must be Brooklands (01932 857381, brooklandsmuseum.com) at Weybridge. In fact, it's several museums in one. Separate exhibitions are devoted to aircraft, motor vehicles, racing cars, buses and more. All in a historic setting that was a pioneering motor-racing circuit and aircraft factory. I've found it requires more than one visit to see everything, so on my recent foray I concentrated on the London Bus Museum (01932 837994, londonbusmuseum.com).

"We have the biggest collection of working buses from the capital," said a proud volunteer. "You can go for a ride in one if you like." As if on cue, a smart red Routemaster pulled up outside.

I was more interested in admiring the range of buses spread out around the vast gallery. Many from the days of my youth when, along with several school mates, I was an eager spotter who trawled suburban bus garages in search of numbers. Today, I admired Green Line buses that were exotic "catches" for a 12-year-old. And a Guy Motors' Arab single-decker bearing that company's distinctive Native American radiator cap. This mascot appeared on the manufacturer's vehicles from the mid-1920s.

Probably the county's most hidden attraction is the 15-mile-long River Wey Navigation. It stretches from the Thames, at Weybridge, to Guildford. At least 370 years old, it once provided the fastest route to London for goods. The grandaddy of inland waterways – predating the canal age – it is maintained for leisure and pleasure by the National Trust (01483 561389, nationaltrust.org.uk/river-wey-and-godalming-navigations-and-dapdune-wharf). Not having a boat, I decided to spend a day exploring by bicycle.





Left: A restored sign at the Hand and Spear hotel, concealed behind trees near Weybridge station. Right: A picturesque view of ruined Newark Priory rose from the floodplain like a miniature version of Tintern Abbey. Below: A Guy Motors Arab single-decker bearing the company's distinctive Native American radiator cap on display at London Bus Museum, Weybridge.

The towpath is level, and the scenery delightful, so it was an easy ride.

The first surprise was a towering Victorian hotel called the Hand and Spear (01932 828063, handandspear.co.uk), concealed behind trees near Weybridge station. A customer who was leaving remarked: "Treasure Island was written here, I'm glad I stopped by." A quotation inside confirmed that author Robert Louis Stevenson worked on drafts of his classic there. "I corrected them, living for the most part alone, walking on the heath on dewy autumn mornings," he wrote, c1880. Next came a gargantuan mill and warehouses beside the navigation's deepest lock: Cox's Mill. I could imagine empty barges being loaded (converted to apartments, it is now quiet).

Pedalling beneath the M25 motorway, I reached Parvis Wharf, the last rural wharf to survive on the cut. A store occupies an old timbered grist mill, with a boatyard next door and moored vessels completing a pretty scene. The waterside now became thickly wooded with gnarled old oaks; I waved hello to a pair of paddleboarders enjoying some gentle exercise. The Anchor at Pyrford was busy, being a large and evidently popular waterside pub. A lone narrowboat came chugging by and we both passed a house once inhabited by poet John Donne (1572-1631).

A sudden downpour didn't dampen my enthusiasm, as a picturesque view of ruined Newark Priory (visitsurrey.com/listing/newark-priory/105361101) appeared, beyond the river. It rose from the floodplain like a miniature version of Tintern Abbey. Though it's situated on private land, a walker told me a service is held there once a year, on Easter Sunday. After a pause (and much needed shelter) at the Seven Stars pub, rain gave way to sunshine. Nearing Guildford, another highlight was Dapdune Wharf, where the National Trust has created a popular attraction around historical barge building sheds and gunpowder stores (a regular cargo in days gone by). Boat trips operate in season.

A few days later, I was back at Dapdune, enjoying the summertime River Wey Festival. In the evening, a carnival procession of boats set off towards the city. As darkness descended, strings of fairy lights lit each vessel. An enchanting sight, especially seeing the boaters were clearly enjoying their parade.

Sometimes, museum exhibits can pose more questions than answers. Such as the memorial to "Poor Old Ike" who died in 1913 that I spotted in Caterham's eclectic East Surrey Museum (eastsurreymuseum.org.uk). Ike, it turns out, was a primate who was a British soldier's pet during the Boer War. How difficult was it keeping an ape during a major conflict? Was he retired to Blighty after war ended in 1902, or kept in South Africa? How did he die? There are some queries that even the best museum can't answer.

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06/04/2025	Vintage Puglia	Vintage
02/05/2025	Italian Vintage	Classic
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06/06/2025	Portmeirion and Railways of Snowdonia	In Style
12/06/2025	Vintage Central Portugal	Vintage
14/06/2025	Rails and Lakes of the Dolomites	Classic
19/06/2025	Douro - Rail, River and Wine	Vintage
20/06/2025	The Best of Bulgaria and the Cherry Festival	Classic
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09/07/2025	By Train to the Midnight Sun	Vintage
03/08/2025	Mountain Railways of Trentino	Classic
05/09/2025	Hidden Slovenia	Classic
11/09/2025	Vintage Port	Vintage
12/09/2025	Berlin, Dresden and the Harz Mountains	Vintage
14/09/2025	Vintage Slovenia	Vintage
19/09/2025	Vintage Baltics	Vintage
29/09/2025	The Catalonian	General
01/10/2025	Rail Wonders of Sardinia and Corsica	Vintage
09/10/2025	The Railways Around Bilbao	Classic
11/10/2025	Classic Montenegro	Classic
19/11/2025	Naples and Sorrento	Vintage

Worldwide Rail and Culture Tours

Departs	Tour Name	Category
06/03/2025	Let's Clear Cambodia - Again	General
30/05/2024	The Canadian	Culture
June/July	Big Boy Photography Tour	Enthusiast
24/06/2025	Rail & Natural Wonders of Alaska	Grand Tour
12/09/2025	The Great Peruvian Adventure	Grand Tour
04/10/2025	Western States Rails and Parks Adventure	Grand Tour
06/11/2025	Rail and Historical Wonders of Mexico	Grand Tour

UK Rail and Culture Tours

Departs	Tour Name	Category
06/06/2025	Portmeirion and Railways of Snowdonia	In Style
08/06/2025	PTG Annual FREE trip on FR/WHR	Free
June TBC	West of England Steam, Fine Dining and NT	In Style

Railway Enthusiast Tours

Departs	Tour Name	Category
25/01/2025	PTG 25th Anniversary Tour - Spain	All
06/03/2025	Let's Clear Cambodia - Again	General
15/03/2025	Alco Reuninification Vietnam - part 1	Enthusiast
02/05/2025	Hungary Eger tour - Special charter train	Enthusiast
09/08/2025	Baltic States – Part 1 – Lithuania	Enthusiast
12/09/2025	The Great Peruvian Adventure	Grand Tour
29/09/2025	The Catalonian	General

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Left: The cruises offered various activities, which matched the holiday camp culture pretty well. Right: The new RMS Mauretania's maiden voyage from Liverpool to New York on 17 June 1939, returning to Southampton via Cherbourg on 30 June 1939.

Cruising 50s Style

Stephen Wade looks back at the postwar holiday experience on the ocean waves

Recent advertising features in the press have profiled the Queen Anne, a new arrival which honours Cunard's heritage, with an eye on the future of world cruising. It offers what we would expect: "A voyage on this new ship from Cunard reveals a vessel that is simultaneously a sumptuous resort hotel, a chic dining and nightlife space and a thrilling event venue." In the 1950s, the enticement to travel was very much the same, except there were functional limits to the entertainment.

Nonetheless, that decade was one of the great ages of leisure travel, following on from the boom in every variety of world trekking, from train journeys to the far east, to airline excursions to almost anywhere. A desperate war had been fought, and there was a hunger for real leisure – something at the very heart of a peaceful world.

As far as Cunard was concerned, its offerings began in 1839, with Sir Samuel Cunard's mail service across the North Atlantic. After World War Two, the Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth appeared; these were massive, being the largest ships anywhere for a few years until competitors arrived. Until those fast jets came on the scene, though, there were around 20 years of the kinds of sea journeys that provided exactly what war-exhausted Brits longed for: feet-up relaxation, with ocean views, plenty of food and drink, and activities which could rival what Butlin's had to offer, from film shows to concerts, and from dances to horse racing and gambling.

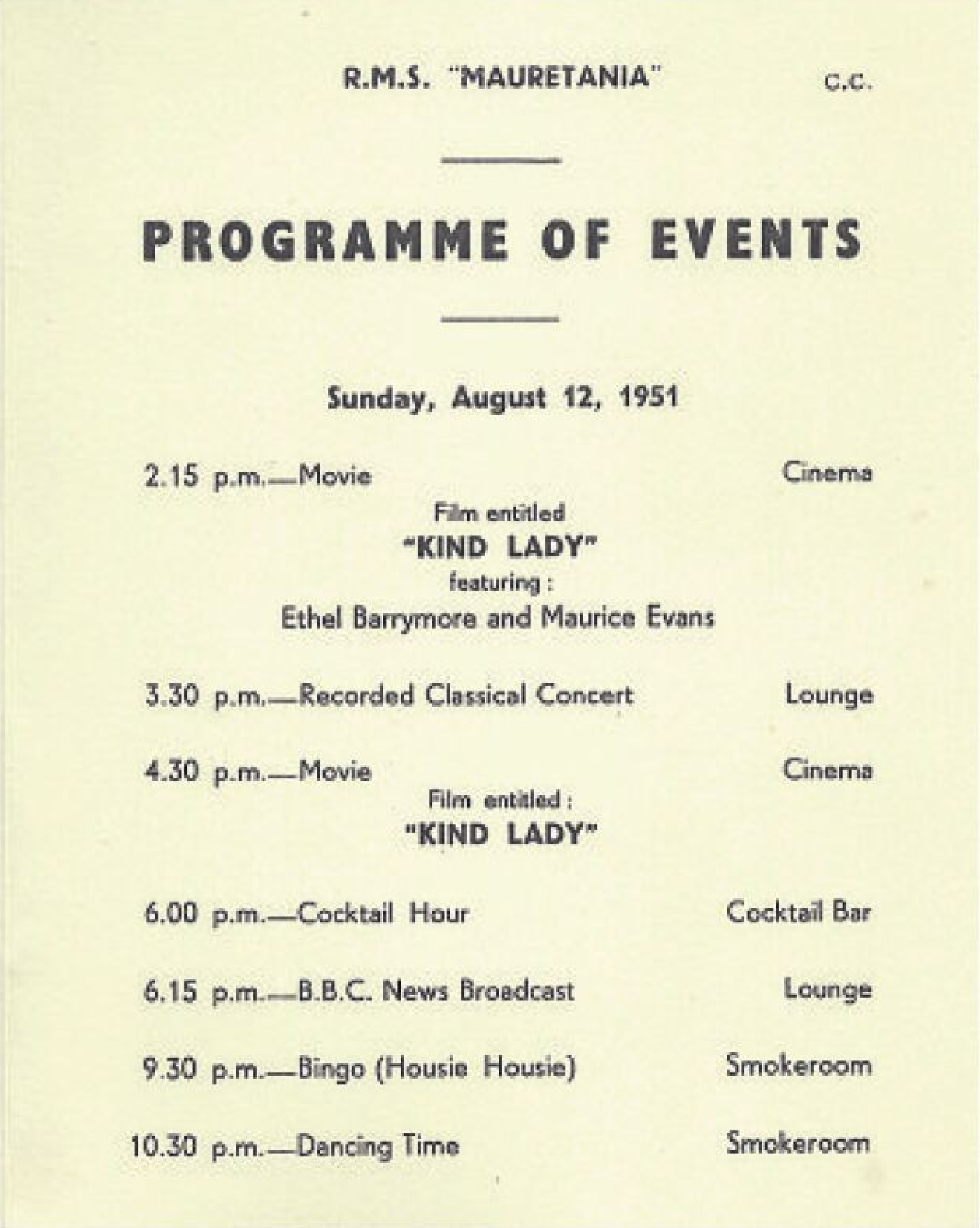
The Cunard history stretches far back and had known problems long before the 1950s. In the Edwardian years, 33,200-tonne RMS Mauretania, launched in September 1906, was the very latest thing in ocean travel, but economic influence was always a factor. One anonymous crew member, writing a note home in 1907, gave hints of major trials in the line: "We arrived here this morning after having a terrible time. Well, our ship is sold to the Greeks so we shall be paid off. Coming home Sunday morning... Eddie." Of course, passengers never knew a thing about any issues and glitches in the realms of high finance and the world of the shipping magnates. The trick is, when running a cruise line, to reassure all clients that there is security, stability and confidence in all areas of the work involved.

It was always important to have a professional image, and in the 1950s, there was a very prominent stress on professionalism in the ranks. The handbooks explained the hierarchy and the images involved. The commodore, for instance, had "one broad ring and gold lace" and in contrast, the staff chief engineer had "four rings and gold lace, with purple velvet between". No doubt, there was always hot competition to sit at the captain's table.

The cruises matched the holiday camp culture pretty well, too. This was notably an active participation in the activities. Notices on the cruise leaflets describe this attitude: "It is proposed to hold a table-tennis tournament. Will passengers wishing to take part in this event please write their names on the list posted on the blackboard on 'M' Deck Square."

A typical evening's entertainment on the second RMS Mauretania, launched in July 1938 and one of the first ships built for the newly formed Cunard-White Star company following the merger in April 1934 of the Cunard and White Star Line, for instance, comprised a film, followed by "orchestral selections" on recordings, along with a concert. Then the ship's own orchestra presented "popular melodies". These diversions took the day to the early evening cocktail hour, followed by a news broadcast, a

Photograph: (Lead) Cunard/University of Liverpool


R.M.S. "MAURETANIA" C.C.

PROGRAMME OF EVENTS

Sunday, August 12, 1951

2.15 p.m.	Movie Film entitled "KIND LADY" featuring: Ethel Barrymore and Maurice Evans	Cinema
3.30 p.m.	Recorded Classical Concert	Lounge
4.30 p.m.	Movie Film entitled: "KIND LADY"	Cinema
6.00 p.m.	Cocktail Hour	Cocktail Bar
6.15 p.m.	B.B.C. News Broadcast	Lounge
9.30 p.m.	Bingo (Housie Housie)	Smokeroom
10.30 p.m.	Dancing Time	Smokeroom

race meeting and a film, with the day ending in a "dancing time". It was all a workable and lively mix of familiar and unfamiliar, but all tastes were catered for.

There was a great deal to understand and to deal with in a Cunard cruise back then. Helpful literature supplied by the company gave all kinds of details relating to practicalities and potential difficulties on board, from taking pets to security matters for baggage. There certainly were perils, such as the problem in this note: "Passengers are cautioned against checking their baggage with truckmen who station themselves at the street entrance to the company's piers. Representatives of the Hendrickson Transfer Company, a reliable organisation, will be found on the upper level of the company piers."

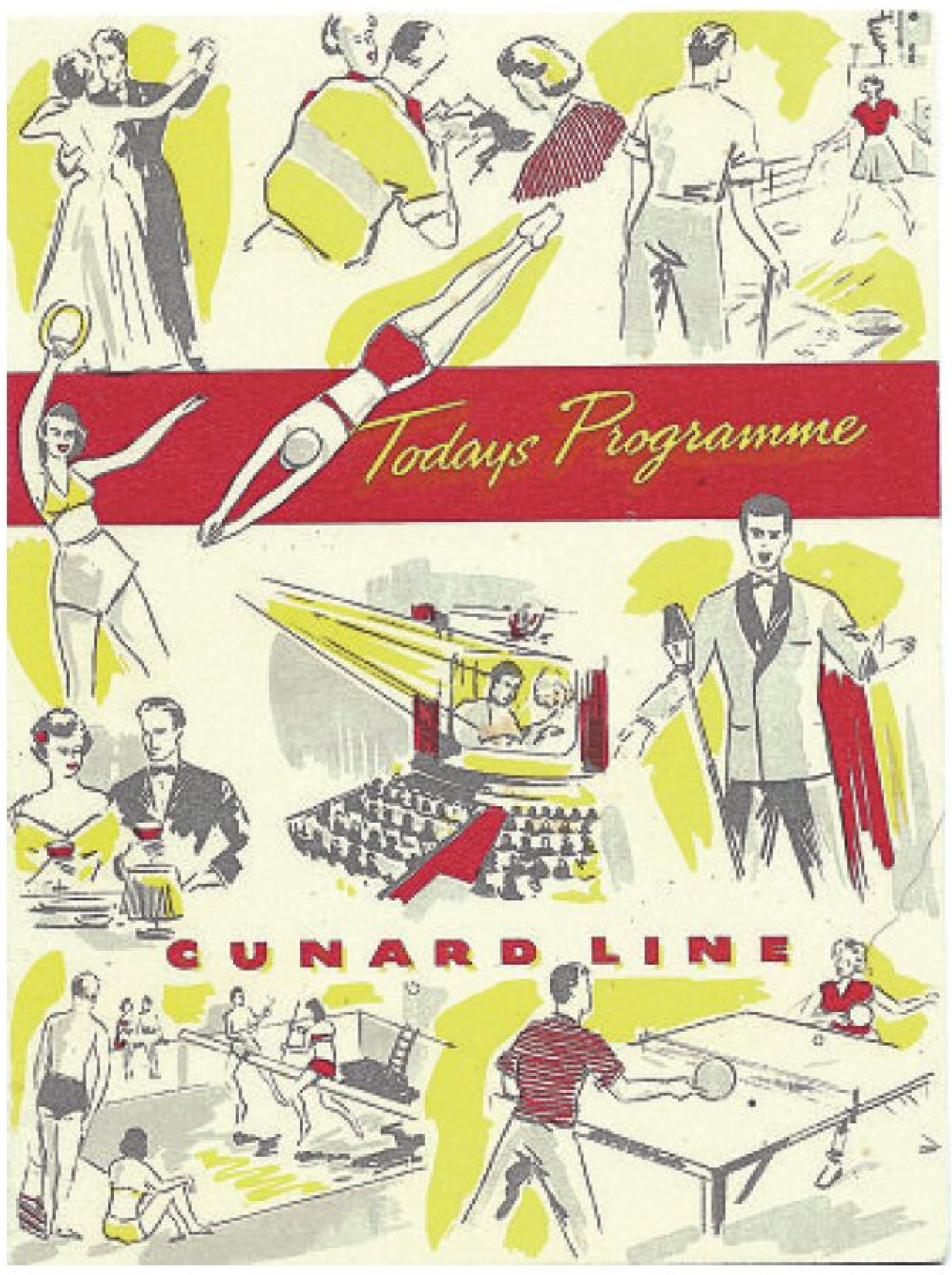
When it came to travelling with the British people's favourite friends, pets, there was a lot left to chance and to personal attention to security. This was boldly expressed in the guidance: "All animals are carried at the sole risk of the owner as to accident, disease, mortality, loss, theft, or necessary destruction." There were kennels on board, but nothing for cats; there had to be vets' certificates for dogs and cats, and individual passengers had the responsibility of dealing with customs requirements in the context of various ports of nations across the globe.

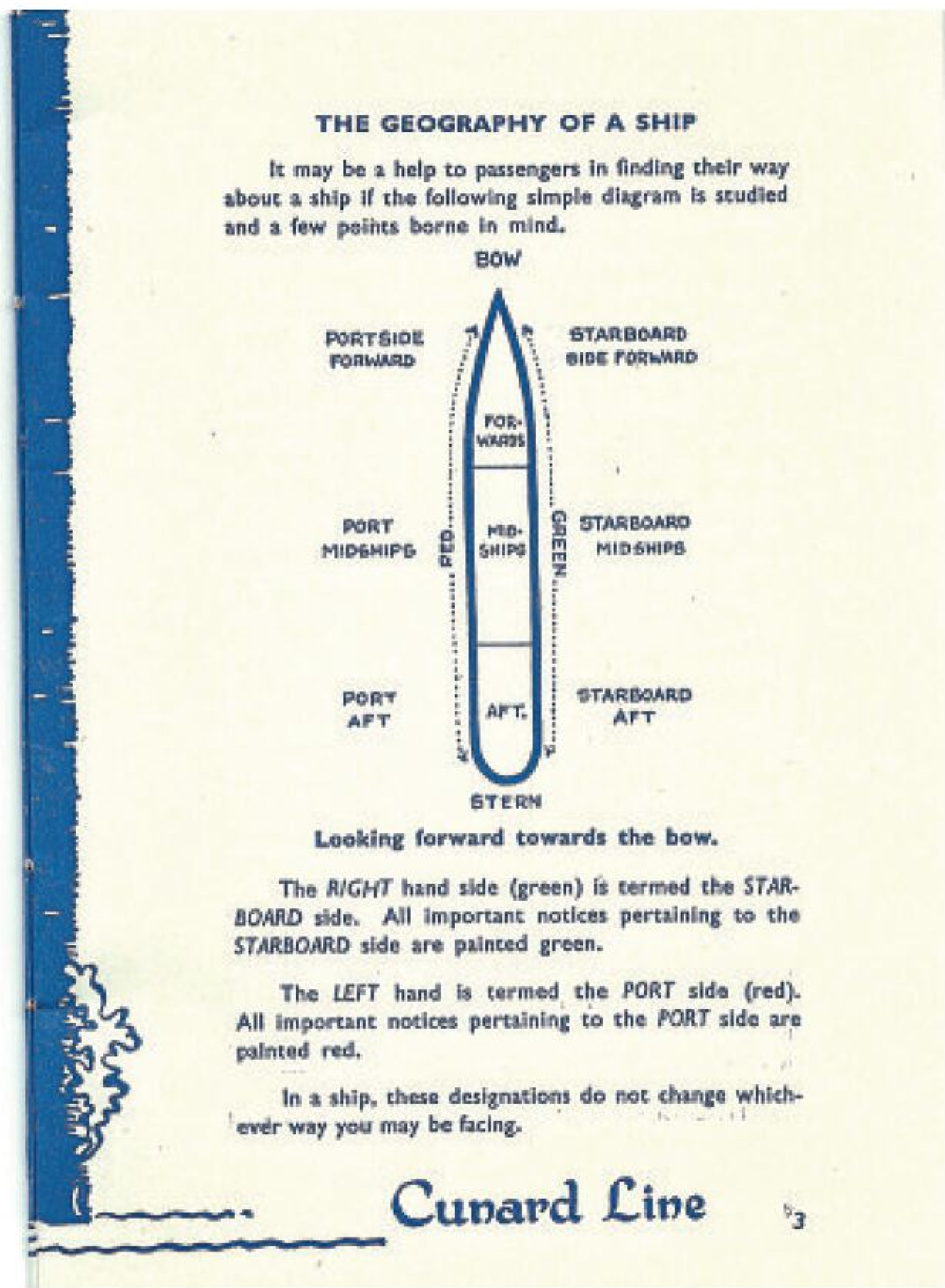
Of course, at that time, virtually everyone smoked. They saw the likes of Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall chain-smoking and looking cool in their brooding romantic roles on screen, and so a packet of Navy Cut or Woodbines was in most pockets. But, on board a Cunard vessel, there was obviously a need for the staff to give special attention to the risks involved in smoking. We can detect this is a note such as: "Passengers are specially requested to exercise care in disposing of cigar and cigarette ends and matches, and to make use of the receptacles provided for the purpose in the different parts of the ship, in view of the serious consequences which can arise from carelessness in this respect."

Still, the keynote was on that special pleasure of travelling on the ocean waves, looking at distant horizons, and forgetting about the working world at home. There were some of the special attractions on board 70 years ago, and these are much the same as today: "Hairdressing and beauty culture saloons are available, fitted with modern equipment – charges as per tariff displayed." For traditional recreation, there was a free library with "up-to-date works of fiction and general literature, in many languages".

As has surely always been the case, despite all the demands and responsibilities of an ocean cruise with Cunard, the attractions are, and always have been, the same: a spectacular visual and sensual experience, both as one moves around the ship, and in places seen and visited. One might also argue that what a cruise gives us a slice of fantasy, perhaps coming from the world of James Bond or the stories of W Somerset Maugham.

Today, Cunard stresses its provision of "elegance" with "cutting-edge technology" and surely those aims were at the centre of their provision 70 years ago.




THE GEOGRAPHY OF A SHIP

It may be a help to passengers in finding their way about a ship if the following simple diagram is studied and a few points borne in mind.

BOW
PORTSIDE FORWARD
STARBOARD SIDE FORWARD
FOR-WARDS
PORT MIDSHIPS
RED
MID-SHIPS
GREEN
STARBOARD MIDSHIPS
PORT AFT
AFT.
STARBOARD AFT
STERN

Looking forward towards the bow.

The *RIGHT* hand side (green) is termed the *STARBOARD* side. All important notices pertaining to the *STARBOARD* side are painted green.

The *LEFT* hand is termed the *PORT* side (red). All important notices pertaining to the *PORT* side are painted red.

In a ship, these designations do not change whichever way you may be facing.

Cunard Line

93

Left: An attractive booklet giving the programme of events on the RMS Mauretania II. Right: A useful diagram showing the nature of the vessel for travellers. Top right: A summary of the entertainments available on a typical day of a cruise.

A virtual exhibition that revisits Cunard 175 – Voyage Through History, a 2015 exhibition hosted by the University of Liverpool, is available to view at libguides.liverpool.ac.uk/library/sca/cunard175exhib

A Spark Into a Flame

Simon Stabler speaks to an EastEnders original

For many actors, one of the biggest hurdles they face is in persuading their parents to let them go to drama school. Not so in the case of original EastEnders cast member Paul J Medford.

"My parents sent me to a stage school when I was five," recalls Paul. "I must have displayed some kind of sense of performance. I think I used to stand in front of the television, so no one could see it. So, they figured: 'Well, obviously he wants to be inside this box, let's send him somewhere where he can exploit all those things that he likes to do.'"

Originally a pupil at the Barbara Speake Stage School, the independent school run by the formidable team of June Collins – mother of popstar Phil Collins – and the eponymous Miss Speake, Paul would later study at the Italia Conti Academy of Theatre Arts.

"Barbara Speake's was a fantastic school. They really did prepare you for the industry. You were out there as a working kid, expected to be professional and you were."

As with any other school, Paul studied the core subjects such as English, Maths, History and Geography but with singing, dancing, acting and music replacing classes such as PE, woodworking and cookery.

Aged 10, Paul played the young tearaway Devon in Black Joy; one of the first black British films to gain widespread public attention, it was entered into the 1977 Cannes Film Festival.

"June Collins, who was the agent at the time, sent me for the audition. I had only done, I think, two things before that. The first thing I did was the very first commercial for McDonald's that the UK ever had, then I did an episode of Return of the Saint, and then I went for the audition for Black Joy.

"It's a long time ago, so I can't really remember the audition process as much as I can remember the making of the movie. And I can remember being in Cannes with my mum for the film festival. That was kind of special."

Playing the roguish Dave King was Norman Beaton, then the star of LWT's The Fosters, while Devon's mother, Miriam, was played by actress, presenter and peer Floella Benjamin.

"Norman I wasn't so familiar with, but my family were like: 'Oh, he's a legend'. But, of course, I knew Floella from Play School. She was always very kind, she was great. I think she's known more as a presenter and a philanthropist, but she is a phenomenal actress."

Appearing on TV in episodes of The Professionals, Grange Hill and Play for Today, Paul made two films for the Children's Film Foundation, starring alongside the likes of Sadie Frost in A Horse Called Jester, and Dexter Fletcher in 4D Special Agents.

In 1984, Paul secured a place at the prestigious Duke Ellington School of the Arts in Washington DC. While waiting for the course to start, he continued to work, appearing with Kid Creole & the Coconuts in the musical There's Something Wrong in Paradise, and attending an audition for what would become EastEnders.

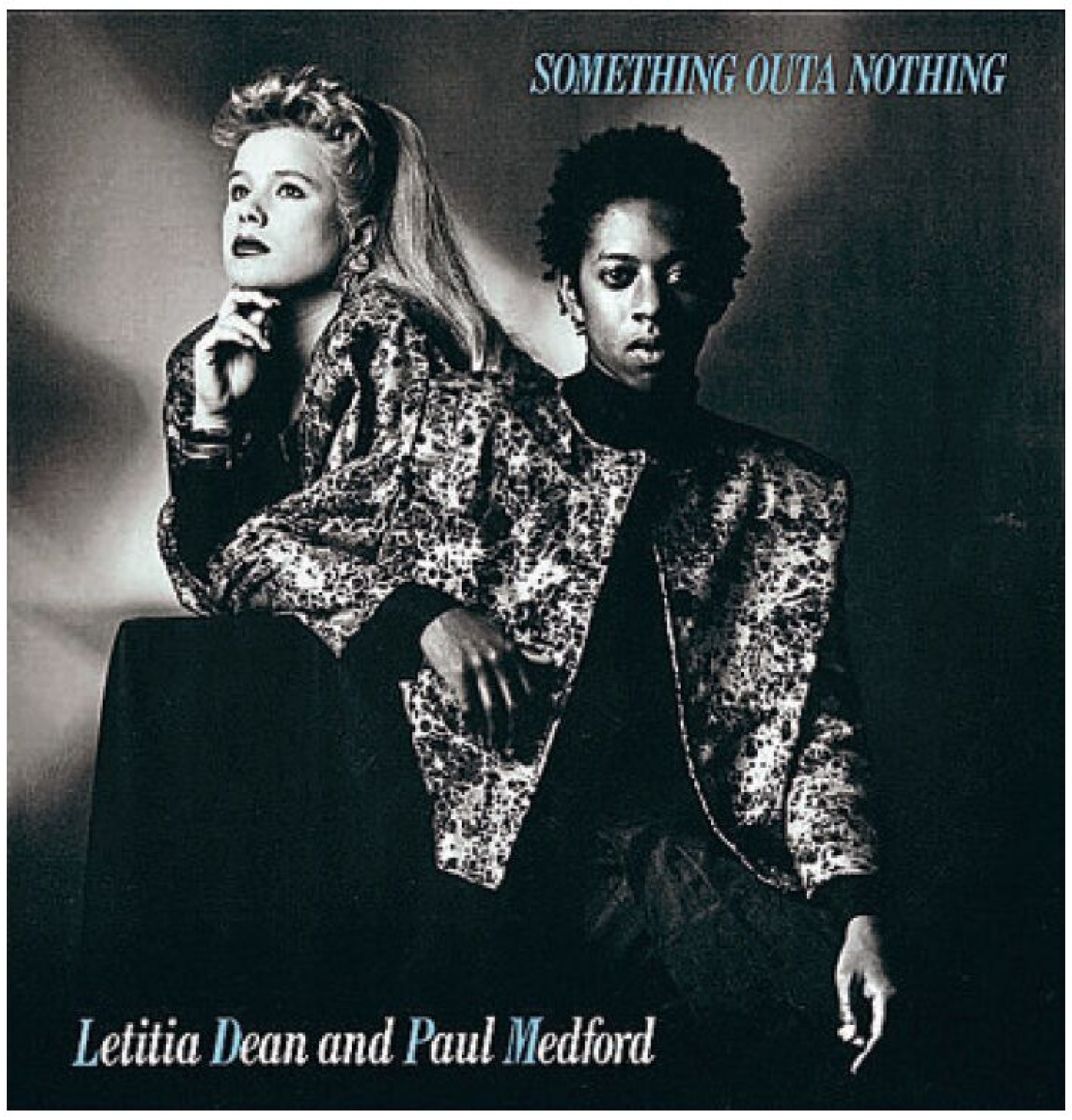
"My agent at the time sent me an audition for something called East 8. But I only knew the sides from my part. So, I didn't know it was a soap opera. He sort of mentioned it was something like a Play for Today for the BBC.

"I went and met Julia Smith and Tony Holland, and then they called and offered me the part. I think it was a six-month contract, and my visa hadn't come through yet. So, I called the principal of the school, and said, 'Hey, the visa hasn't come through yet. I've been offered this role. Can I come late and do this role?'

"First, he said: 'Yes, work is work, you know?' Americans are fantastic like that. 'It'll be great experience, do that and then come and join us in the spring semester and we'll figure it all out.' And so, I took the job.

"Then I got to the first press call on the lot at Elstree, and there were so many people there. I thought this was just a small Play for Today thing. Then I saw Wendy Richard who was literally a legend from Are You Being Served? So, I did the press call. We all stood in Albert Square, took this amazing photograph. And then I saw the Evening Standard announcement: 'BBC's new soap opera, EastEnders.' And I was like: 'Oh, my God. This is so much bigger than I thought it was going to be. All right, here we go.'"

As student Kelvin Carpenter, Paul worked closely with Oscar James who played his builder father, Tony. Given how believable the characters were, I wondered if the pair had developed them together.


SOMETHING OUTA NOTHING
Letitia Dean and Paul Medford

Top: Paul J Medford played Kelvin Carpenter, one of EastEnders' original characters, from March 1985 until September 1987. Left: An EastEnders storyline, where the younger characters formed a band, saw Letitia Dean and Paul enter the real-life singles chart.

Photographs: (Lead) BBC, (Five Guys) ANL/Shutterstock

The cast and crew of Five Guys Named Moe including the show's creator, Clarke Peters, who is pictured sitting on the floor in front of Paul.

"No, but of course, Oscar was also in Black Joy. I had known of him for a long time but no, we just bonded. I still call him now, we still speak. We used to travel to work together and he's such a terrific, terrific guy. So, no, we didn't do any development. We just got the script turned up and started working. It just worked."

In 1986, an EastEnders storyline saw some of the younger members of the cast form a band. As a result, two of their songs were released as singles. Sung by Nick Berry, who played Simon "Wicksy" Wicks, Every Loser Wins went to No 1 in the singles chart, while Something Outa Nothing, sung by Paul and co-star Letitia Dean (Sharon Watts) peaked at No 12. Although released by the corporation's own BBC Records & Tapes label, the moody black and white cover had more in common with releases by Madonna.

"This is because Letitia and I took full control over that editorial. We decided what we were going to wear, we decided the shoot. I think I went and got the clothes, you know, it's not like now where there are stylists and creative directors and people all stepping in to make it happen. Letitia and I did that ourselves, full control. We just did it because there was no one to say: 'No, you can't.'"

Although he enjoyed working on that storyline, Paul's favourite ("One of the big doof doofs") was when Kelvin was involved in a love triangle between Sharon and Michelle (Susan Tully).

"Obviously, at that time, we didn't have social media. So, we didn't realise what impact it was having. We're in the laundrette and Letitia says to me: 'I'll go on the pill if you like.' I didn't realise what a big deal that was for teenagers to be talking about going on the pill in terms of sex education and stuff like that. That was a pretty strong storyline, which led into who was the father of Michelle's baby. And I think that was pretty big."

Making his EastEnders debut on 12 March 1985, three weeks after the show began, Paul remained with the programme until 3 September 1987 when Kelvin headed to university, and he made a return to the stage.

"I had grown up very much in the musical theatre world. I'd been in the West End since I was six. So, I wanted to explore that side of my talent. I wanted to sing, and I wanted to dance. I really missed tap, and I missed a lot of stuff.

"My dream would have been to be able to shoot EastEnders in the day, and then in the evening get on a motorbike and head to the theatre and do my show and then wake up. But with the way the scheduling was back then, it was impossible. It was pretty much either or. No one gave me the opportunity to say: 'Hey, take six months off to do a musical in the West End and come back.'

"Many years after I left, actors from EastEnders became viable propositions for the West End or for pantomime and those sorts of things. So, I thought I can't have it all I have to have one or the other. So, I said: 'OK, I'll take a chance and get back out there and audition against everybody else and see what can happen.'"

After playing Buttons in Cinderella, Paul went to the National Theatre, appearing in the likes of The Changeling and Batholomew Fair before playing the breakthrough role of Little Moe in the musical Five Guys Named Moe.

"Five Guys Named Moe was the dream of all dreams for me, and it was created by Clarke Peters, who played my dad in The Professionals. If anyone was confused about what I couldn't do in terms of triple threatness, Five Guys was the all singing, all dancing, all acting part that I needed to solidify myself as legit. People that knew me knew, but getting cast in musicals was a little bit difficult coming out of a soap opera initially and then after that, the reviews were very kind for us and the audience was very kind. It just opened the doors terrifically. And I have to thank one particular casting director called Pippa Ailion, who literally is responsible for my entire West End career."

Transferring to Theatre Royal Stratford East followed by The Lyric, Shaftesbury Avenue, Five Guys Named Moe received rave reviews and was nominated for four Olivier Awards including Best Actor in a Musical for Paul.

"That was a shock, yeah. But not to be blase and not to be casual, when you're raised in a theatre school, those things are instilled in you that they are irrelevant. So, like awards and things like that, they mean nothing to us as kids, they just don't. We're not trained to seek a career in that way, we're just trained to do the work and get paid and make sure everything's club aesthetic, but we are literally trained, and I can quote this, we are literally trained not to hear the applause."

In 1993, Paul played Hud in the short-lived West End revival of Hair ("That's like one of those fantastic Broadway stories of it opened and closed in the same week"), starring John Barrowman, Sinitta and Wham!'s Pepsi. "Sinitta and Pepsi, I speak to nearly every day. We're still very close."

As well as appearing on television throughout the 1990s and early 2000s in episodes of This Life, Casualty and a regular role in the Jed Mercurio-written science fiction series Invasion: Earth, Paul's stage work included productions of Sue Townsend's The Queen and I, as Mr Tumnus in the RSC's production of The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, Daddy Bruebeck in Sweet Charity, and Mr Beauregarde in the Sam Mendes-directed musical of Charlie and the Chocolate Factory at the Theatre Royal Drury Lane. He also moved into choreography and directing, which included choreographing the Young Vic's revival of the musical Simply Heavenly.

Today, Paul, who had to evacuate his Hollywood home during the recent wildfires, is vice president of unscripted programmes at cable channel

Nickelodeon, responsible for multi-million dollar budgets and overseeing shows such as The Kids' Choice Awards and sports show NFL Slimetime. I wondered what prompted the leap from actor to TV executive.

"I stopped doing shows in 2017. But I had decided about 10 years before that I wanted to make the switch, primarily because I started when I was five. So, by the time I got to 25, I'd already had 20 years in the industry.

"I'm also very good at things on the other side. I'm a bit of a producer's nightmare, because I'm like: 'Is this the best way to promote this show?' I always entered the room with that brain. So, I always knew that I was going to be good on the other side of the camera.

"And then when I moved to America, these opportunities just kept coming at me to work on shows in either casting or production and I just took them and eventually you get to work with people and meet people, and then someone that I had worked with was at Nickelodeon and they were changing things up there, and he said: 'Would you be interested in coming in as the VP?' and I was like: 'I've never done this before' and he said: 'But you're the always the person on set that says the network are going to hate that and then they come and they hate it. So, I feel like you have that kind of eye.'

"I work on the Paramount lot and ran into Dexter Fletcher the other day. He's a fantastic director now. He's done many things, he's a perfect example of someone that made the switch consciously, was deeply talented as an actor but also really had a 360 view of everything. He could tell you exactly which shot was which, so it made perfect sense to me when he became a film director."

Although "not desperate" to return to acting, Paul would make an exception for certain shows.

"The last thing I saw on television and thought: 'This is amazing, if I had my time again, I'd want to be in a show like this,' was Interview With the Vampire, there's been two seasons of it, and I thought: 'This is amazing.'"

And what about EastEnders? What would Paul do if he was ever asked to make a return trip to Walford?

"I have not been invited to go back. But yes, someone asked me this the other day, and my answer is the same. If the storyline is great, absolutely. That's it. That's for me. In terms of acting, period. If there's a great storyline, I'm never going to say no."

Eary Closing

Chris Hallam tells the story of a short-lived ITV soap opera

Forty years ago this month, a new British soap opera became an immediate smash hit with the viewing public. That show was EastEnders. Six months on, however, another soap opera was launched on ITV. In an alternative universe, in which the new series, Albion Market, had proven to be a massive success, characters such as Derek Owen, Lynne Harrison and Morris Ransome would doubtless be as famous as the likes of Den and Angie, Pat Butcher and Dot Cotton are today. Its stars would have seen their lives utterly transformed and become household names off the back of it. Chart-topping pop singles would have been released in its name. As it is, 40 years on, Albion Market is largely forgotten.

The first episode aired at 7pm on Friday 30 August 1985. Produced by Granada Studios, the same ITV franchise which had produced Coronation Street since 1960, the new "continuing drama series" (the term "soap opera" was officially frowned upon) initially aired twice weekly on Fridays and Sundays at 7pm. Over time, the Sunday broadcast was moved back to around 6pm while LWT and TVS soon dropped the Friday edition entirely preferring to air the week's two episodes as a Sunday double bill. Like most such series, the premise was simple, centring on the everyday lives of a group of people associated with a busy covered market in Salford.

Although there was no direct connection between the two shows, Granada were keen to present Albion Market as a companion piece to Coronation Street which is also set in the Greater Manchester area. On the launch of the new series, one optimist at Granada is said to have proclaimed: "When Coronation Street celebrates its golden anniversary, Albion Market will be celebrating its silver anniversary."

As we now know, The Street did indeed reach that milestone in 2010. But, by then, Albion Market would be long gone.

Whereas EastEnders famously opened with the discovery of a dying Reg Cox (Johnnie Clayton), the first Albion Market saw market superintendent Derek Owen (David Hargreaves) being forced to evacuate after receiving an anonymous bomb threat over the phone. With the danger seemingly passed, the day's trading resumes as normal, until a dramatic explosion erupts, seconds after the audience sees a shadowy figure deliberately starting a fire.

Other emerging characters and storylines include mother and daughter traders Lynne and Lisa (Noreen Kershaw and Sally Baxter) who are anxious about the release of Lynne's husband, Roy (Jonathan Barlow), after serving a jail sentence for his involvement in a robbery and a developing rivalry between stall owners Geoff Travis (Geoffrey Leesley) and Morris Ransome (Bernard Spear). Daffy but amiable Youth Training Scheme recruit Carol (Barbara Wiltshire), meanwhile, struggles to find her feet in the canteen.

Scheduling would always be an issue for the soap and the opening episode came up against the BBC One chat show Wogan. The Beeb took the new threat posed by their rival seriously with Terry meeting an unusually impressive range of guests that evening including Les Dawson, Gloria Gaynor, Mel Gibson, Roy Kinnear and Joanna Lumley.

The mid-80s was actually a very exciting time for the world of soap. The next few years would see the medium reaching its peak with EastEnders and Coronation Street attracting some of the biggest audiences ever seen on British TV before or since. Britain's other soaps were largely in a state of transition. After 21 years on the box, ITV's Midlands-based Crossroads, already the main inspiration for Victoria Wood's Acorn Antiques sketches, was in

Photograph: ITV/Shutterstock

ALBION
MARKET

The original cast of Albion Market, a show seen by Granada as "companion piece" to its more popular Coronation Street.

a state of crisis and would end in 1988. In contrast, Emmerdale Farm which had started in 1972, was in the slow process of transforming itself from a somewhat sleepy rural daytime drama at the mercy of "regional variations" in ITV's schedules into a major evening soap which, from 1988, would simply be known as Emmerdale. Similarly, after an uncertain start, the Liverpool-based Brookside which had first aired on Channel 4's opening night in 1982 was now attracting widespread attention with a series of hard-hitting and controversial storylines including an armed siege erupting within the Close.

It would be fair to say Albion Market did not benefit from this new golden age of soap. Critics argued that whereas the activities of EastEnders' Bridge Street market merely served as a backdrop to the main action, Albion Market's storylines were somewhat over-fixated on the intricacies of stall allocation and other minor details of everyday market life. On the plus side, Albion Market had a much better record for employing a racially diverse cast than Coronation Street at the time with Asian actors Dev Sagoo and Paul Bhattacharjee taking major roles and Malaysian-born Pik-Sen Lim playing Derek's love interest, Ly Nhu Chan.

Reviews were one thing but ratings were another. At the root of Albion Market's problems was its inability to attract an audience. The show took a particular beating when pitted against two other northern tradesmen, Arkwright and Granville, when the final series of the much-loved sitcom Open All Hours aired on BBC One towards the end of 1985.

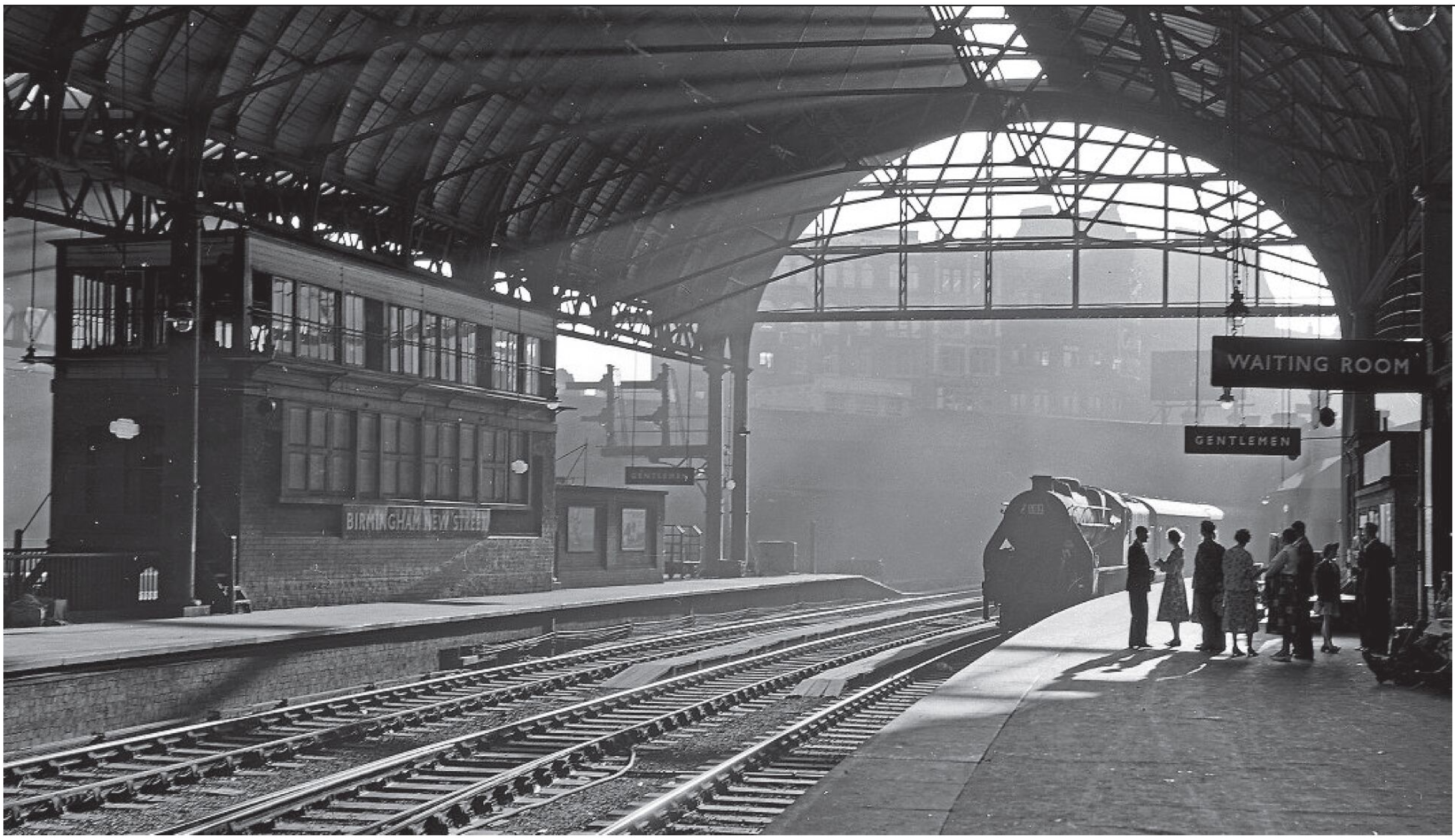
Some celebrity casting was attempted in a bid to boost ratings. Helen Shapiro who, as a teenager in the early 60s, had stormed the hit parade with catchy pop hits like Don't Treat Me Like a Child and Walkin' Back to Happiness, was cast as market regular Viv. Tony Booth, best known for playing Alf Garnett's son-in-law in Till Death Us Do Part also appeared in a couple of episodes. Casting an old sitcom actor was a shrewd move: Are You Being Served?'s Wendy Richard had, after all, been the most famous person on EastEnders when it had started. Booth was also generating headlines for his relationship with soap siren Pat Phoenix.

But nothing could save Albion Market. The 100th and last ever episode aired on 24 August 1986, just 359 days after the very first.

The final storyline was dominated by the marriage of Derek's deputy, Keith Naylor (Derek Hicks), to Louise Todd (Kelly Lawrence). The wedding day was unusually chaotic with the omens for the "happy" couple not looking good. How did the marriage fare? We never got to find out. The wedding car drove away and that was it.

Today, soap operas are neither as popular nor as commonplace on mainstream British TV as they were in 1985. American soaps such as Dallas and Dynasty still attracted peak-time audiences then, while Australian exports such as The Sullivans and The Young Doctors (often dating from the 70s) still filled the ITV daytime schedules. The real Aussie soap boom had not yet begun; the first episode of Neighbours did not appear on BBC One until two months after Albion Market ended. Today, Dallas, Dynasty and the homegrown Brookside are long gone, Australian soap Home and Away is broadcast on Channel 5, while Neighbours is restricted to the streaming service Amazon Freevee. Hollyoaks on Channel 4, however, continues to attract a young audience. But while EastEnders, Coronation Street and Emmerdale remain the three British soap big hitters, none are as popular as they used to be. Soap operas are no longer the most watched shows on British TV, in the way that they were only a decade ago.

Thankfully, unlike the notorious Eldorado which became an embarrassment to the BBC after it was also cancelled after only a year in 1993, Albion Market never became a national laughing stock. Most people just never saw it. Forty years on, it remains an intriguing footnote in British TV history.



A Lineside Legacy

John Hillier celebrates the work of railway photographer Eric Oldham

I must have been about 16 when I first heard about and subsequently met Eric Oldham who was to be my photographic mentor for many years. He lived in Hyde but, although I lived in Marple Bridge at the time, I travelled daily by train to Hyde Grammar School via the grandly titled Hyde Central station.

As our school playing field used to border the Manchester to Sheffield line, the fence there became a regular haunt for those who, like me, preferred the sport of "train watching" to the usual sporting activities on the field. It would have been during one of those gatherings that I discovered one of the photographers whose work appeared from time to time in Trains Illustrated (TI) lived and worked in the town, and was a leading member of the photographic society there.

My parents had given me my first camera, a Kodak Brownie 127, to take on a school trip to the 1960 Rome Olympics. I returned with a few memorable but not very good pictures which caused me to want to improve my photography – and the equipment I was using – as well as try to emulate the fine pictures in TI and elsewhere. I soon discovered that Eric had a baker's shop and visits to the shop on Market Street to buy an iced bun or two were soon on the agenda.

In truth, it was a chance to attend meetings of Hyde Photographic Society, which provided the opportunity to meet Eric and subsequently get lots of valuable practical advice about techniques, films and how to develop them. I was also able to admire the large, mounted exhibition prints that he produced for society print competitions and for various exhibitions. Looking at them it was no wonder that the name "Eric Oldham" could regularly be found engraved on winners' cups.

Eric was an excellent teacher and enthusiastically gave me his time, tips and advice. He also gave me some of his old developing equipment which I put to good use having once convinced my parents that the bathroom would be returned to normal use after being blacked out and used as the darkroom.

By then, I was using my dad's 35mm camera when with better results and, armed with a few of my own prints, I used to gingerly approach Eric for his comments. Looking back, I suspect, like all good teachers, he chose his words carefully so as not to discourage a pupil so eager to learn.

Eric had joined the prestigious Railway Photographic Society in 1950, which meant that his own

Top: Eric captured the light, shade and atmospheric conditions of Birmingham New Street station as a Class 5 entered the cavernous station before it was rebuilt. Left: Eric Oldham photographed all the British Rail regions from the 1940s until the 80s.

ABERDEEN FLYER
60022
1F78
SHOP AT THE CO-OP
30792

Left: A railwayman admires world speed record holder 60022 Mallard which had just returned from Aberdeen after a 37-hour gruelling trip with the SLS/RCTS Aberdeen Flyer on 2 June 1962. Right: King Arthur class locomotive 30792 Sir Hervis de Revel crosses Canute Road, Southampton, having set off from the Ocean Terminal with a boat train to London Waterloo.

work was viewed and critiqued as his prints were circulated between fellow members, many of whose pictures appeared in print regularly. One of them, Maurice Earley, the RPS's secretary, had formed the society in 1922 and it was his practice to vet the work of all prospective members to ensure that the high photographic standards achieved over the years by the society did not drop.

Eric was instrumental in suggesting that I too should apply for membership and, after following the established vetting procedure, was admitted into the ranks of the RPS in 1964; perhaps without Eric's guidance and endorsement my application to join its august ranks might not have succeeded. Once I joined, our photographic discussions became more focused and quietly competitive.

Eric had originally intended to take up an art-related career but in the event took over the family baking business and became a master baker instead. However, as his brush work was exemplary, he produced some outstanding pictures over the years. He usually painted using watercolour or gouache techniques, although oil was sometimes the medium he used.

He was a founder member of the Guild of Railway Artists, having exhibited at its fledgling 1977 exhibition before the GRA was officially formed in 1979 and was one of the few subsequently given honorary membership in recognition of all that he did for the guild. His work was also displayed, at the National Railway Museum in York, and has been used on record sleeves and elsewhere.

Eric's craftmanship was also seen in a large shed in his garden where he painstakingly built a superb OO gauge model of his beloved East Coast Main Line, where a number of his favourite engines were able to exercise themselves. A favourite was 4472 Flying Scotsman, which featured in a film produced by his younger brother, Kenneth Oldham, and which now resides in the NRM archives.

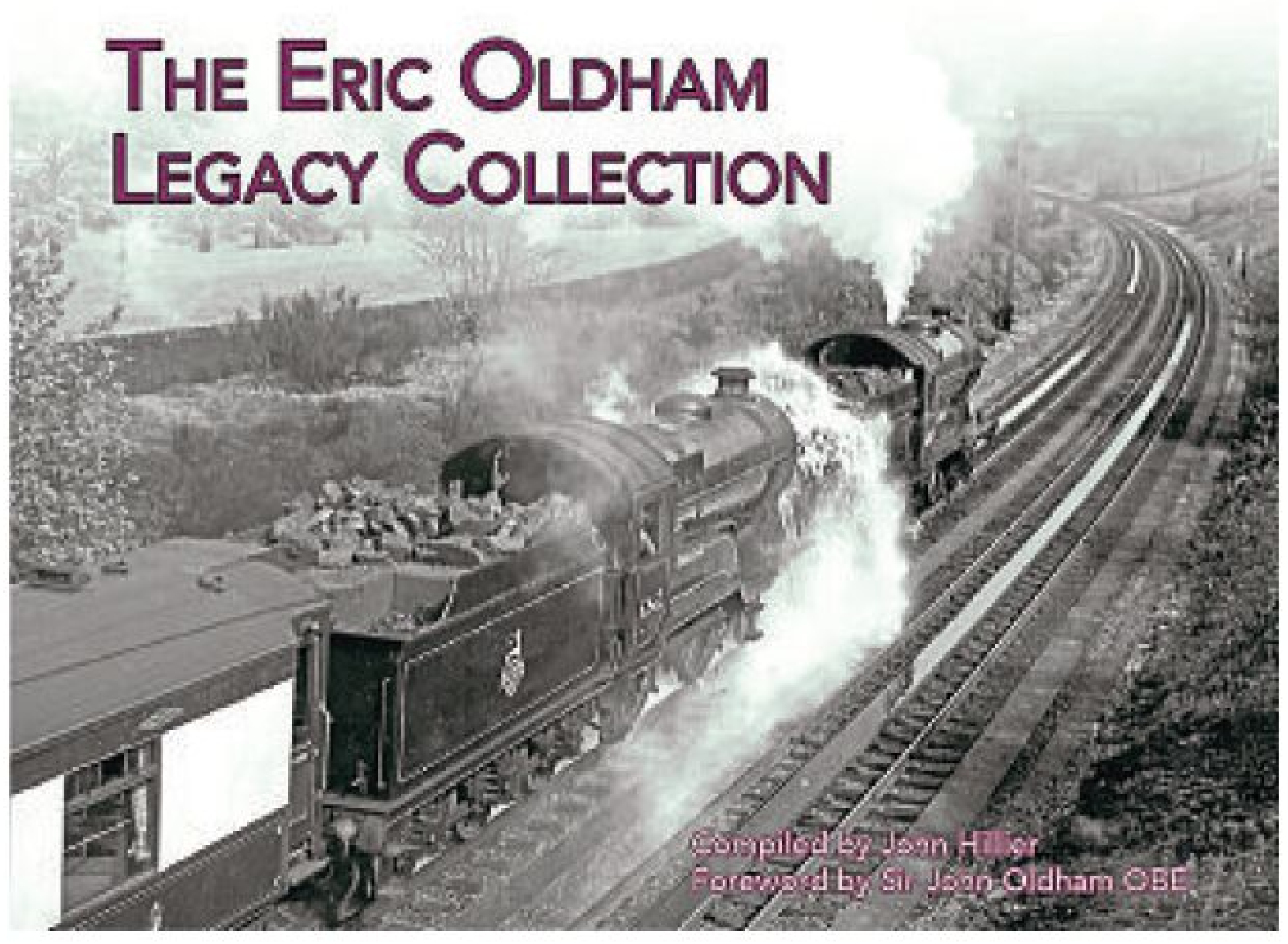
Ken mentions that both brothers acquired Coronet box cameras in 1934 when they set out.

The Oldham brothers both attended Hyde Grammar School and they too took up suitable vantage points by the sports field fence just as I did many years later.

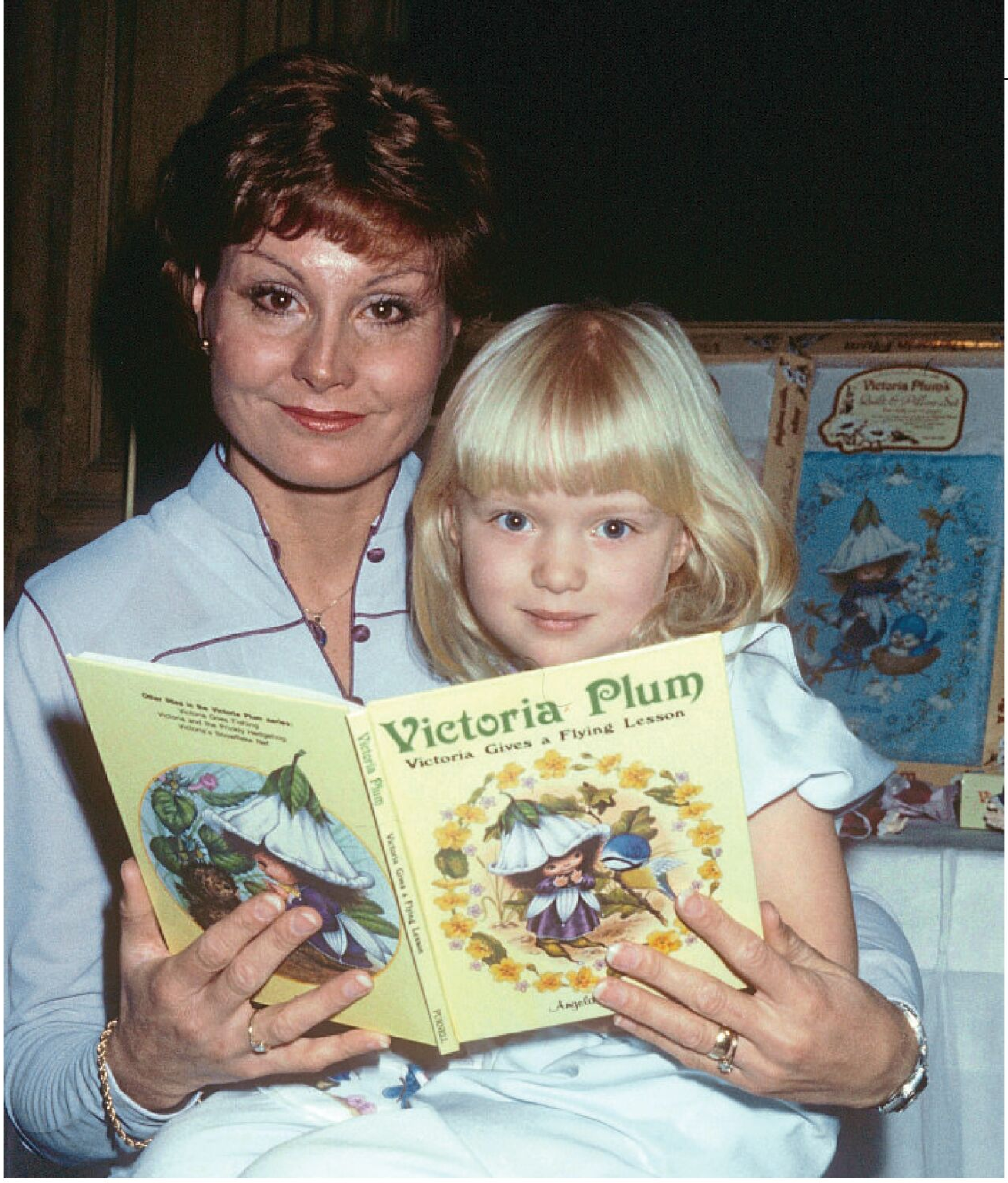
Eric's work meant that his own photography was often limited to half days when his shop was closed, or to Sundays and holidays; as he did not drive that too hampered his opportunities to get out to lineside locations. He did travel to locations with his brother and colleagues from the Manchester Locomotive Society, of which he was a member, from time to time and I was occasionally his chauffeur once I passed my driving test in 1964.

Sadly, Eric died in August 2008, aged 87, but I did not find out until sometime later when I began to enquire about his photographic collection, fearing that it might have been lost. I need not have worried. I heard a whisper that it was in the hands of his nephew, Sir John Oldham OBE, who lived in Glossop.

I made contact and was pleased to learn that the collection of priceless negatives and pictures was in safe hands and that John also had railways in his blood. Since then, we have been in regular contact as we both felt that the work of his uncle deserved a wider audience. The result, a book entitled The Eric Oldham Legacy, features a wide collection of locations and motive power with pictures by Eric on each of the BR Regions from the 1940s until the 1980s.


THE ERIC OLDHAM LEGACY COLLECTION
Compiled by John Hillier
Foreword by Sir John Oldham OBE

Featuring previously unpublished photographs and paintings from the country's railways, The Eric Oldham Legacy Collection is published by Silver Link Books. Priced £35 (including free UK delivery), it is available from mortonsbooks.co.uk or by calling 01507 529529.


Victoria Plum
Victoria Gives a Flying Lesson

The Novice Fairy

Susan Brewer remembers Victoria Plum, a children's character that appeared on notebooks and other goods in the 1980s

Do you remember Victoria Plum, a character which found fame in the 1980s? Victoria was the brainchild of television personality Angela Rippon, who dreamed up Victoria's persona and adventures. Victoria was a fairy, but, instead of the usual slim and dainty fairies with delicate, wispy dresses and beautiful faces, this fairy had frizzy hair, a snub nose and a cheeky face. She looked like a rather mischievous child.

Oh, and she had no wings. Apparently, Victoria Plum came into being after Angela was shown a series of greetings cards drawn by Roger Hutchings, a director of WN Sharpe, who suggested that perhaps she could create a background for the character and write a series of storybooks about Victoria for children to enjoy.

I have always loved the Victoria Plum character, and, when my daughter was young, she was a great fan of the little fairy. A few years ago, I was working on a book about girls' toys and decided to contact Angela to see if I could find out more about Victoria Plum. She was very helpful, telling me: "It was an unusual way to go around creating a children's character, because previously the style had been for a writer to create a character, and an illustrator to visualise the character through the drawings."

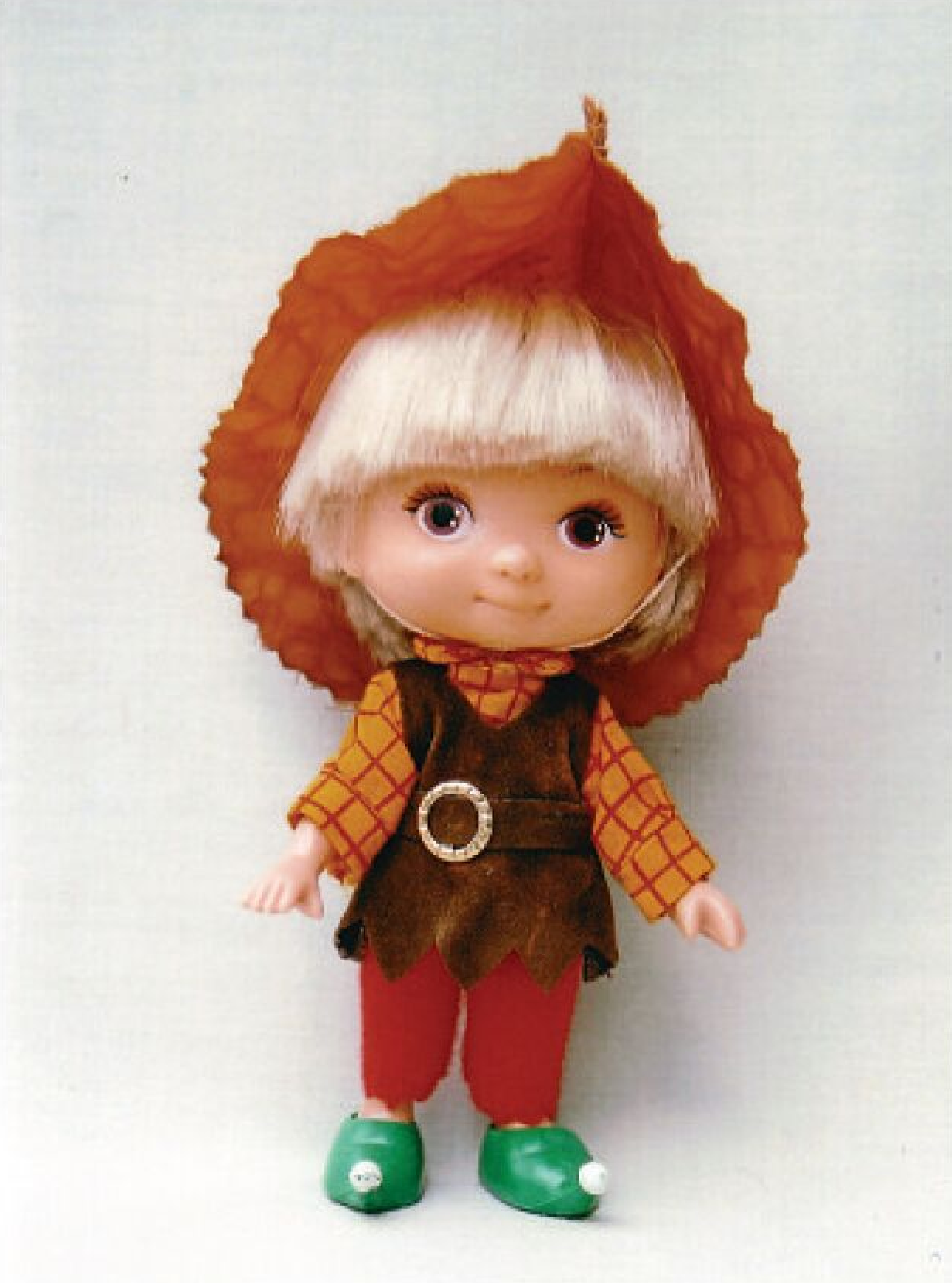
When she studied the greetings cards, she decided it was clear to her that Victoria Plum was a fairy: "But not any kind of fairy – because she had such a little girl's face, she was a novice fairy, one who was still learning the job. As a result, she would not always get things right."

As Angela was reading the national news at the time and was also strongly associated with programmes about the natural world, she felt that not only would it be good to build on the credibility, creating stories with a real feel to them, she knew it was the perfect opportunity to allow children to explore nature in all its forms. She wanted children to learn about the flowers, trees and various creatures that inhabited the British countryside – not caricatures, but real in appearance.

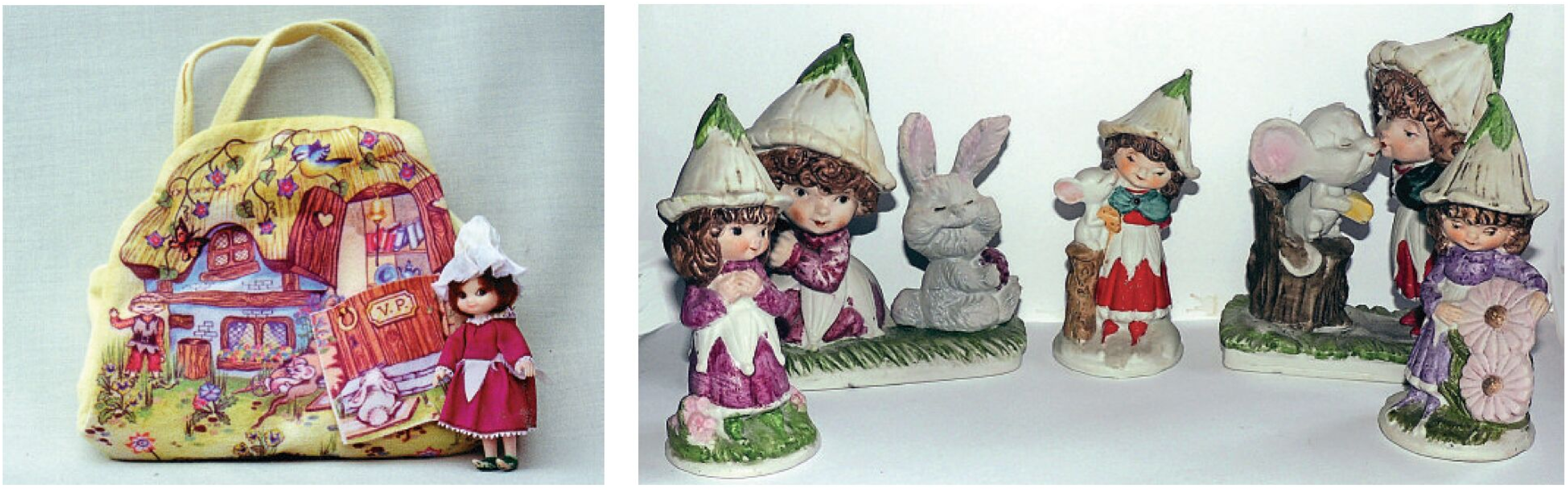
Consequently, Angela decided to set the stories in the countryside around her own home on Dartmoor. She explained: "The property was surrounded by natural Devon dry stone walls, a perfect habitat for a variety of small mammals, birds and insects. This became the setting for the stories, with the woodland and riverbank creatures becoming Victoria's friends.

"One of the stone walls bordering my property had a huge old beech tree growing out of it, and the roots were mingled with the stones. I decided that the roots of this tree would make the perfect house for Victoria and described it in some detail in the first book, Victoria Gives a Flying Lesson. I gave her

Top: After being shown a series of greetings cards, television personality Angela Rippon dreamed up Victoria Plum's persona and adventures. Right: A 6ins doll of Ben, Victoria's elf friend, made by Telitoy, a trade name used by H Schelhorn & Co Ltd of Leicester.



Photographs: (Angela Rippon) Clive Dix/Shutterstock



Above: Perhaps the most innovative of the Victoria Plum range was very tiny doll which stood just four inches tall, and which lived in a lemon yellow, brushed nylon handbag house. Right: Victoria Plum fans were spoilt for choice with the little cheeky fairy appearing on many products including whimsical ornamental ceramic figurines featuring Victoria in various poses.

an elf friend called Ben, who was named after my basset hound puppy, Ben."

It was in the early 1980s that Victoria Plum first appeared in the shops as a doll, and quickly became popular with children. Adults, too, became enamoured with the character, appreciating the gentle fairy with her sympathetic approach to the natural world and her empathy with the woodland creatures she met. She was an excellent role model for youngsters. In the books, Victoria wore a long-sleeved dress with a collar and small buttons, and the skirt was decorated with large, white pointed petals that flapped as she moved around.

Her most distinctive item of clothing was an over-large white hat with green sepals, resembling the flower of a bindweed. She also had green boots with long, pointed toes. The dolls cleverly reflected the outfit, with the dresses being russet, pink or blue, and the shoes often adorned with pompoms. Many of the dolls were marked Telitoy, a trade name used by H Schelhorn & Co Ltd of Leicester, a doll-making family from Sonneberg, Germany who came to England as refugees in the 1930s.

Some of the Telitoy Victoria Plum dolls were very unusual as they had strangely shaped heads which were flat at the back, rather than rounded. Other dolls in the Victoria Plum series were made, most importantly Ben, Victoria's elf friend, who had a hedgehog chum. Perhaps the most innovative of the Victoria Plum range was very tiny doll which stood just four inches tall, and which lived in a lemon yellow, brushed nylon handbag house. When the front was opened, it revealed doors and windows printed on to the fabric, while Velcro flaps enabled the doll to sit at a table or in her bed.

As well as paper dolls, doll's bedding, doll's tea sets and other children's toys, the far-reaching range also encompassed stationery, greetings cards, egg cups, pencils and jigsaw puzzles. For a while, Victoria Plum fans were spoilt for choice with the little cheeky fairy appearing on so many products. Various whimsical ornamental ceramic figurines were also made, among them an attractive series which are unmarked apart from the wording Victoria Plum written in script on the base, though some also bear a "copyright WN Sharpe Ltd 1979" back stamp.

> **"Victoria Plum first appeared in the shops in the early 1980s and quickly became popular with children."**

These bisque ornaments feature Victoria in various poses, sometimes holding a couple of flowers, or a small creature such as a mouse. There are also some slightly larger figurines including one showing her holding a cup and sitting next to a rabbit which is nibbling a biscuit, while another ornament has her kissing a mouse which is standing on a tree stump, clutching a slice of cheese.

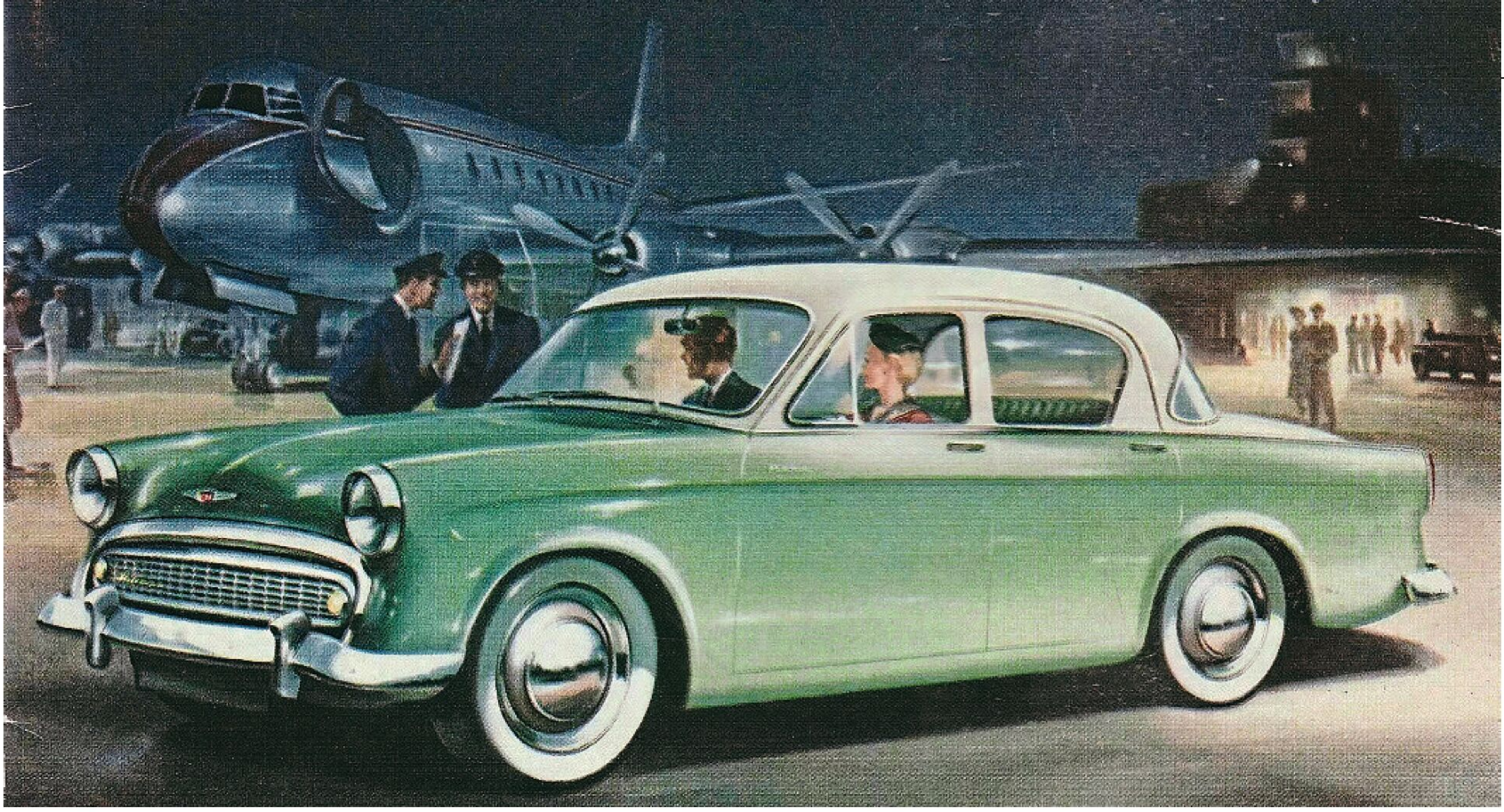
We must thank Angela Rippon for the imaginative way she introduced the Victoria Plum character to children via the storybooks. Angela is a household name who has graced our television screens for more than 50 years. Initially a presenter of programmes in the BBC south-west region, she then moved to the Nine O'Clock News on BBC One, soon becoming a regular face. Her career has embraced a myriad of programmes including the presenting of Come Dancing, Top Gear, Rip Off Britain, Eurovision Song Contest, and Cash in the Attic, among others.

In 1976, she became something of a sensation when she appeared on The Morecambe & Wise Show, initially seated at a desk before demonstrating that even newsreaders had legs as, to viewers' amazement at the time, she joined the comedy pair in a dance routine. In 2023, she demonstrated her dancing skills once more as a contestant on Strictly Come Dancing, where, at the age of 79, she was the oldest contestant in the history of the programme.

Angela has also gained various honours and awards, such as the OBE in the 2004 Birthday Honours for services to broadcasting, charity and the arts, and the CBE in the 2017 New Year Honours for services to dementia care.

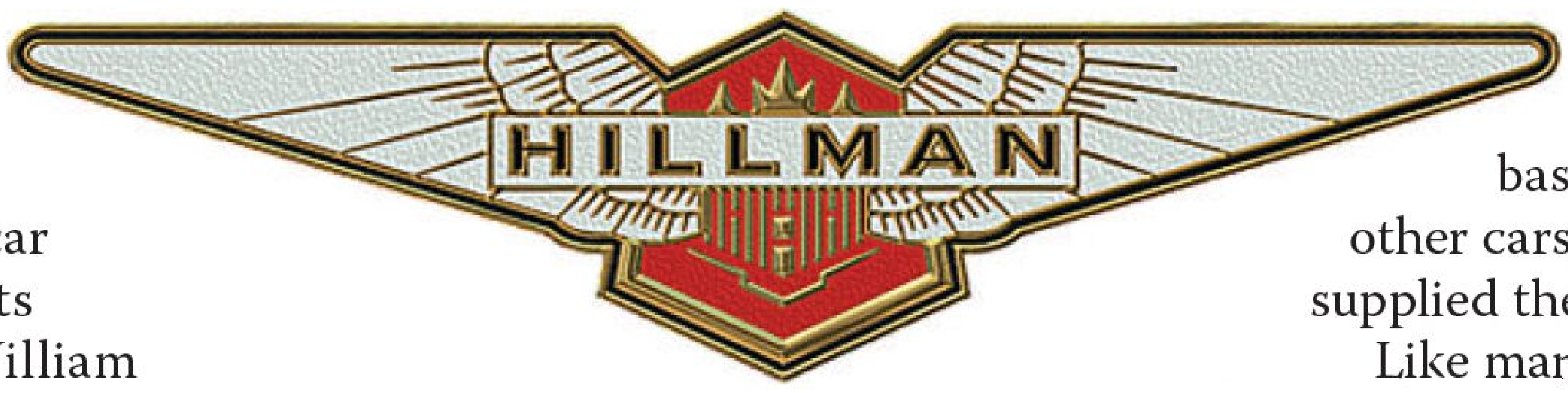
However, for the 1980s generation, Angela will surely always be linked to Victoria Plum, the well-meaning gentle little fairy committed to helping the creatures of the countryside. At a time when the British toy market was dominated by American creations such as Strawberry Shortcake, Holly Hobbie, and Rainbow Brite, it was good to have a character whose books had a definite British feel.

As Angela explained: "It was my aim to gently educate children about natural history and make them feel comfortable with the natural world to the point where they would believe that among the creatures in the British countryside, there really were fairies like Victoria Plum."



Rootes of Success

Dene Bebbington traces the history of Hillman cars



One of Britain's fondly remembered car brands owed its existence to cycle-making. William Hillman became a millionaire in the 19th century from making bicycles and, among other things, became the first British mass producer of ball bearings. His expansion into car-making in 1907 gave birth to the Hillman marque, famous for its popular Minx model which had several incarnations over nearly 40 years.

With designer Louis Coatalen, Hillman founded the Hillman-Coatalen Car Co Ltd based at Ryton-on-Dunsmore, near Coventry. The first cars they made and sold were beasts by modern standards: one with a 6.4-litre engine and the other a massive 9.7 litres. Typical for the era, their first car had runningboards and was open to the elements with leather seats.

By 1910 the company was renamed Hillman Motor Car Co Ltd after the departure of Coatalen to Sunbeam. Smaller engine cars were then introduced starting with the "small six", giving Hillman a foothold as one of Britain's burgeoning car-makers. Sadly, William Hillman didn't see the full fruits of his company, dying on 4 February 1921, aged 72. His sons-in-law John Black and Spencer Wilks ran the company after his death. Under their leadership the Hillman Fourteen, brought to the market in 1925, saw the company gain a greater market share.

Only three years later, the car distributor Rootes brothers acquired majority ownership of Hillman. Despite a merger with Humber, the Hillman name was retained and various models released. Prolonged success came from the family model Minx in 1932. Originally with a three-speed gearbox and 1.2-litre engine, the advertising touted it as having previously unknown liveliness for the engine tax rating. The 1934 Melody Minx was groundbreaking for a British car in having a radio fitted as standard. Until then, a radio had only been an optional extra on certain models. Produced until 1970, the Minx's design evolved to keep up with the times – versions included a saloon, convertible, coupé, estate and a van.

During World War Two, most Hillman cars were used in government or military service. Notably, it was a Hillman 80 that Neville Chamberlain rode in after returning from Germany to report on the notoriously worthless peace agreement signed by Adolf Hitler.

The ubiquitous wartime "Tilly" utility vehicle was based on the Hillman 10 and other cars, since several car-makers supplied these vehicles.

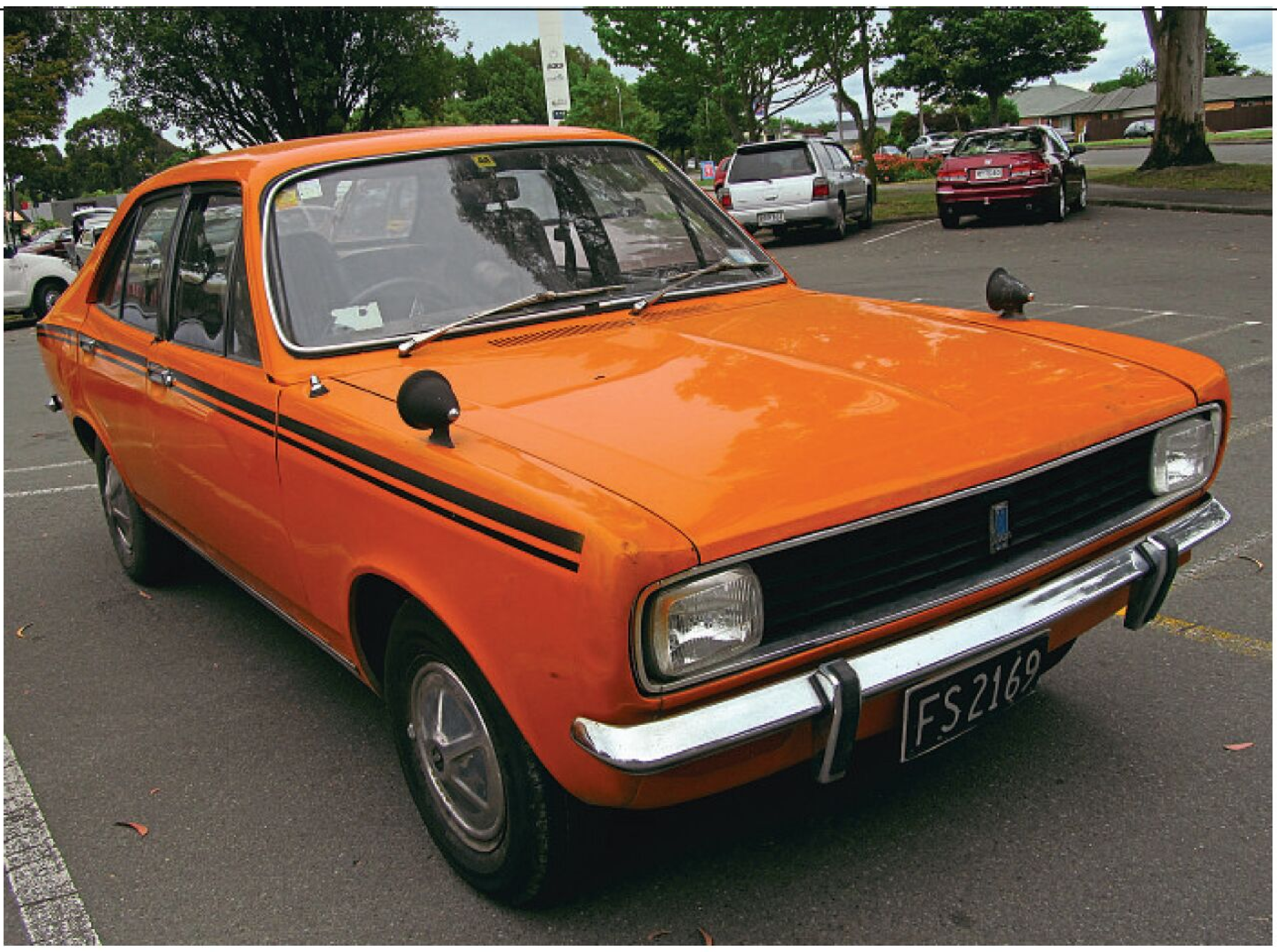
Like many cars, Hillmans had specially designed grilles and a badge. In the earlier years the badge consisted of two wings and the word Hillman written over spires of Coventry cathedral and churches. Not all later cars had this badge; some had Hillman written in metal letters fitted onto the bonnet.

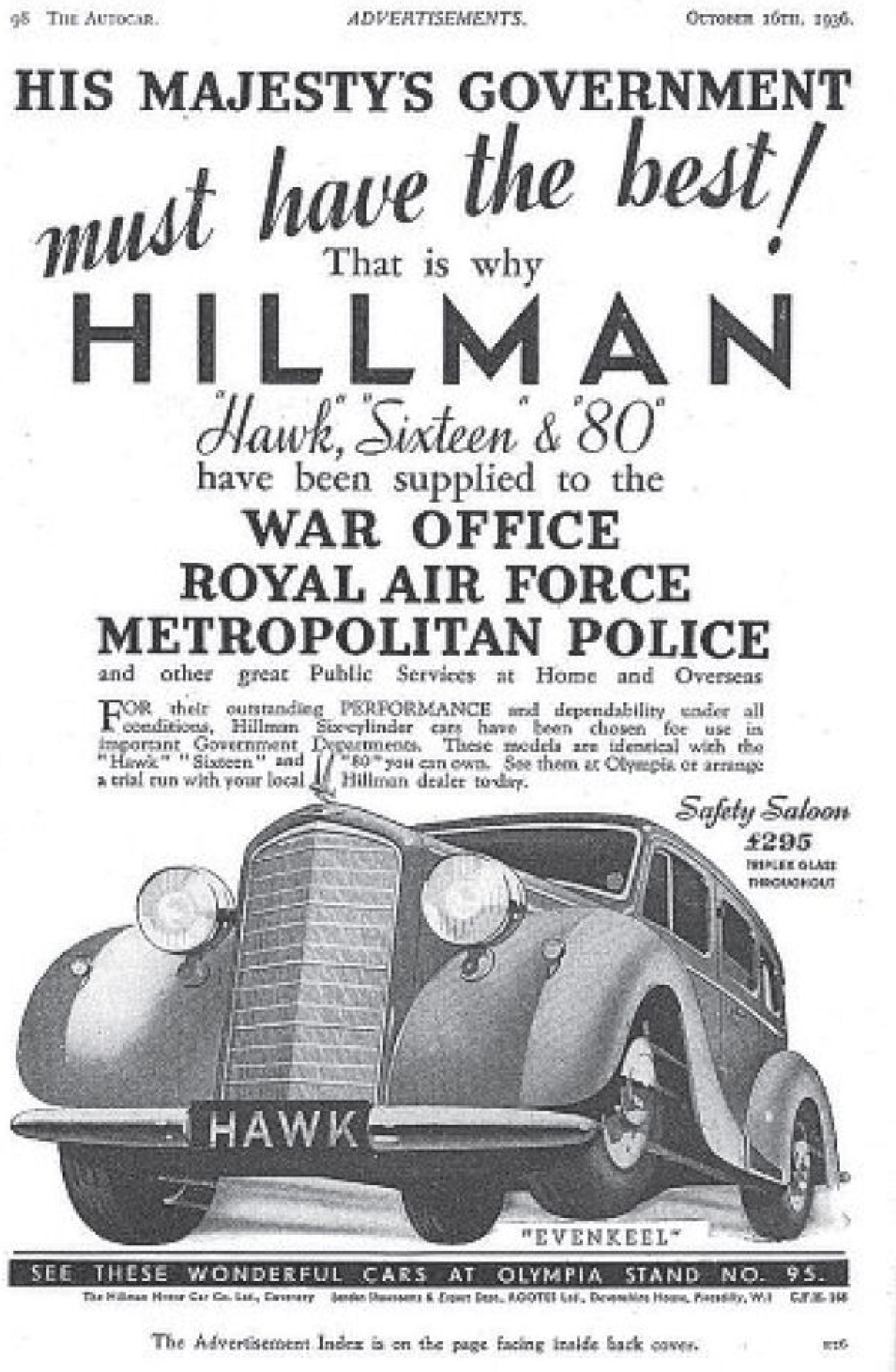
To appeal to couples and families on a tighter budget, the Hillman Husky was developed in 1954. Using some parts of the Minx to keep costs down, it was a small estate with a side-opening tail door (rather than lift-up boot), and it had a floor-mounted gearstick unlike the Minx's column-mounted gear change. By 1957, around 42,000 had been sold. Following this success, the model was changed into the Series I based on the Hillman Minx Audax design. The Husky continued until 1965, ending with the Series III.

As a marque, Hillman fared well in the car market because of its everyman quality for people who needed reliable but affordable cars. Although it was a luxury car-maker at first, postwar, Hillman moved away from trying to

Top: The Hillman marque is famous for its popular Minx model which had several incarnations over nearly 40 years.

Photograph: Avenger) Creative Commons/Riley, (Fourteen) Creative Commons/Robert Knight





98 The Autocar. ADVERTISEMENTS. October 16th, 1936.

HIS MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT

must have the best!

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"Hawk," "Sixteen" & "80"

have been supplied to the

WAR OFFICE

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FOR their outstanding PERFORMANCE and dependability under all conditions, Hillman Six-cylinder cars have been chosen for use in important Government Departments. These models are identical with the "Hawk" "Sixteen" and "80" you can own. See them at Olympia or arrange a trial run with your local Hillman dealer to-day.

Safety Saloon

£295

TRIPLEX GLASS THROUGHOUT

"EVENKEEL"

SEE THESE WONDERFUL CARS AT OLYMPIA STAND NO. 95.

The Advertisement Index is on the page facing inside back cover.

Left: A 1971 Hillman Avenger TC saloon, launched after American car company Chrysler invested in the Rootes Group. The US influence was reflected in its "Coke bottle" sides. Right: Most Hillman cars were used in government or military service during World War Two. Neville Chamberlain rode in a Hillman 80 after returning from peace talks in Germany. Below: Under the leadership of William Hillman's sons-in-law, the introduction of the Hillman Fourteen in 1925 saw the company gain a greater market share.

compete with more sophisticated makes such as Rover.

The heyday of the Hillman brand reached a peak in the 1960s when a new assembly plant was built for the Imp that launched in 1963. To take advantage of government assistance, a decision was made to locate the plant near Glasgow, but the area didn't have enough suitably skilled workers. Being a competitor to the much-loved Mini, the Imp, whose appearance had a certain charm, differed by having a rear engine and small storage area under the bonnet.

Mechanical issues dogged the Imp and cost the company in warranty claims. That, coupled with much lower than anticipated sales, gave the company a financial headache. Things were soon to change again.

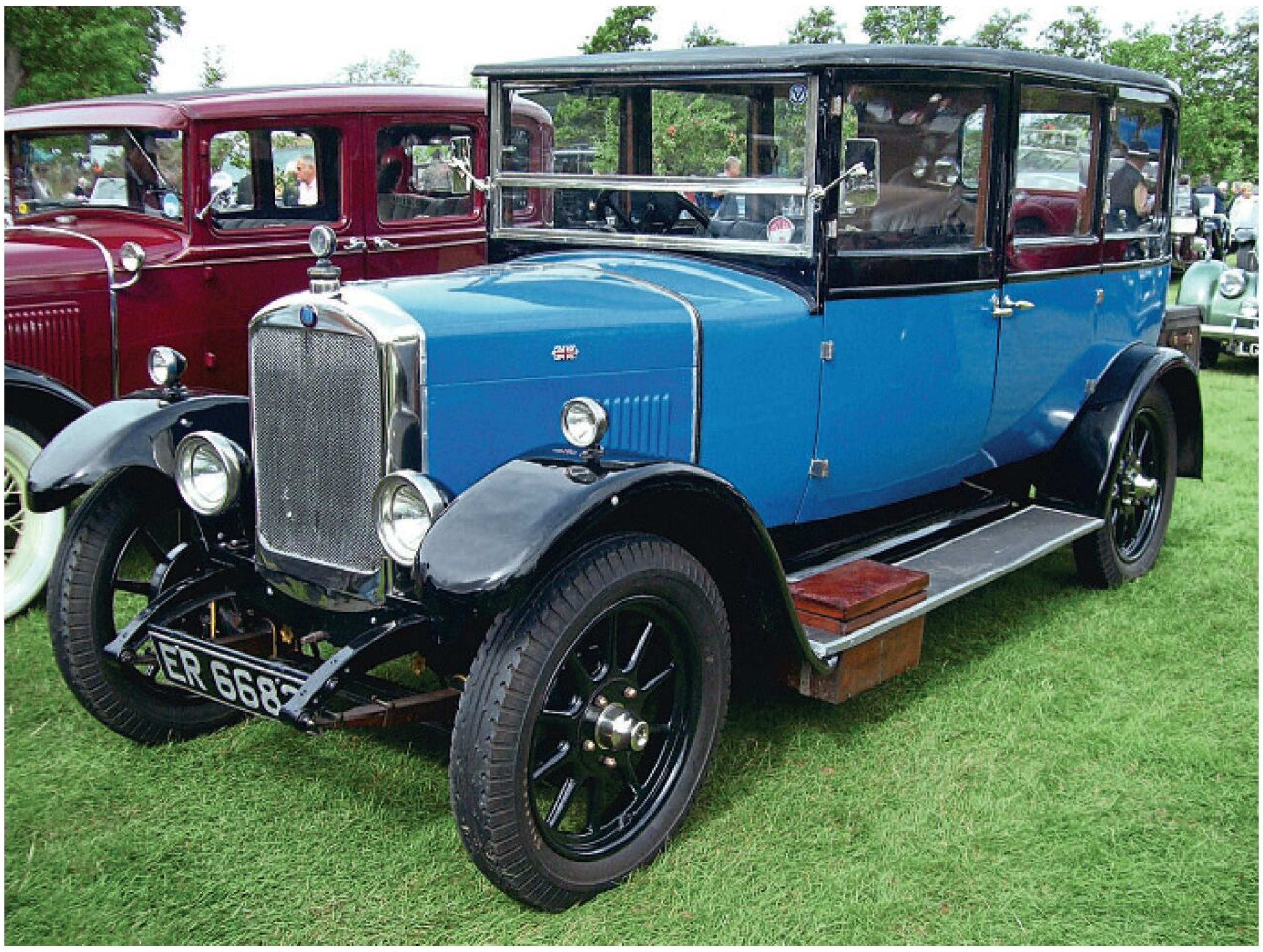
From 1964, the American car company Chrysler invested in the Rootes Group and gained full control in 1967. It continued to use the established Hillman brand for another 10 years, during which it launched the Hunter and Avenger models.

One of the Rootes Arrow range of cars, the Hillman Hunter hit the market in October 1966 with a 1.7-litre engine. Years later, a limited-edition Hillman Hunter Topaz debuted at the 1975 British International Motor Show boasting overdrive, metallic paint, a black vinyl roof and side indicator lights. In the following year, the Hillman name was dropped and this car renamed the Chrysler Hunter. British production of the Hunter stopped in 1979, but it continued to be made in Iran where it was given the name Paykan.

In contrast, the Avenger had originally been intended to compete with the popular Ford Cortina. Unusually for the time, it had a plastic radiator grille, and when launched in 1970 it was then competing with the Ford Escort and Vauxhall Viva. For years many Hillman cars had American influenced designs. For the Avenger, this was reflected in its "Coke bottle" sides.

A few years later, the Avenger also underwent rebadging in the Chrysler era, first becoming the Chrysler Avenger. However, by the late 1970s, Chrysler Europe was in trouble which led to a takeover by PSA Peugeot Citroën. Under one of its brands, it became known as the Talbot Avenger.

Hillman is another story of a British industrial rise and fall due to bad luck and management decisions. The Hillman Ryton factory is long gone, having been demolished in November 2007. Yet this part of Britain's automotive heritage still lives on at classic car shows where various well-maintained models can be seen, and racing versions of the Imp are still in use. Although Peugeot still owns the rights to the Hillman name, it's unlikely to be used again.



A Taste of Hunni

Tim Hutton shines a light on TV presenter Gloria Hunniford's lesser-known singing career

In a trailblazing career spanning more than seven decades, Gloria Hunniford is one of Britain's foremost figures in broadcasting, earning her national treasure status through her pioneering work on radio and television. Today, whether on the panel of Loose Women on ITV or presenting BBC's Rip Off Britain, Gloria is a constant and welcome presence on our television screens. However, this wasn't always Gloria's career path, for she began her professional life as a singer, and throughout her career, music has always played an integral role.

Gloria, once hailed as "Ireland's queen of song", dreamed of being a singer from a very young age. "As a child of three or four, I used to stand on a chair singing for hours into an old Bakelite radio. It sat up on a shelf in our kitchen in Portadown, Northern Ireland and my theory was that if I could hear them, they could hear me, and one day the BBC would say: 'You. Singing Buttons and Bows. We want you.'"

Her father, a semi-professional magician, encouraged the young Gloria to pursue her love of singing, inviting her to join him on the bill with the Mid Ulster Variety Group, performing across the country. "It was my dad who encouraged me to sing, and it was through his encouragement that it made me think there was an ongoing life in this. At the age of seven, he suggested I visit Miss Gail Sheridan, a concert-party pianist, who would teach me songs. My dad was a newspaper man by day and a magician at night, and through his encouragement, I joined the bill as a singer and sang songs like Buttons and Bows, and Powder Your Face With Sunshine."

In her teens, Gloria made the move across the Atlantic to Canada where she found the opportunity to further her singing career, landing her own live radio show performing Irish songs. "At the age of nine, my Uncle Jim returned to Ireland after spending 40 years in Canada. Over the years, he would send letters and exotic food parcels. To me, Canada was the land of milk and honey, and I knew one day I was going to go there. I was only 17 when I made that journey, and on reflection it was a very brave thing to do.

"I'd never been out of Ireland and Canada spread my horizons; I can't begin to explain what it did to my perception of the world. Through a work friend, I was introduced to a television producer, who literally gave me a job on the spot, singing Irish songs on a lunchtime programme. With such a large Irish and Scottish immigrant population in Canada, it didn't take me too long to be offered my own radio show where listeners would request their favourite Irish songs, which I would learn and sing backed by a trio."

Returning to Northern Ireland, Gloria became a production assistant at Ulster Television, later finding a role in front of the camera performing as a resident singer on the popular programmes Tea Time With Tommy and later In Town With Tommy. "I met my first husband,

Top: Whether debating with her Loose Women colleagues or tackling the issues affecting the nation on Rip Off Britain, Gloria remains one of Britain's foremost broadcasting figures. Left: In her teens, Gloria made the move across the Atlantic to Canada where she found the opportunity to further her singing career.

Photographs: From the archive of Gloria Hunniford, (lead) BBC Northern Ireland

M 25159
45 RPM SINGLE
ARE YOU READY FOR LOVE
THE SOUND OF LOVE
GLORIA HUNNIFORD

Ocean
BBC CHILDREN IN NEED
GIVE THE CHILDREN BACK THEIR CHILDHOOD
GLORIA HUNNIFORD

Left: Gloria made her debut record with a cover of the 1969 Song for Europe entry Are You Ready for Love. Right: Appearing on Gloria's 1978 solo album Good Evening, the song Give the Children Back Their Childhood was rerecorded in 1988 and released in aid of Children in Need.

Don Keating, at Ulster Television; he was a cameraman who'd been brought over from ABC in Manchester. When we got married, they wouldn't allow me to work anymore in the department, so I had to leave. But this was when I started to sing in front of the camera. I'd already been a production assistant on a programme called Tea Time With Tommy, so I learned very quickly what was expected of me as a performer on television."

A chance encounter through the In Town With Tommy show with songwriter and record producer Alan Hawkshaw led to Gloria making her debut record with a cover of the 1969 Song for Europe entry Are You Ready for Love. The song, penned by Hawkshaw with Ray Cameron, was originally one of six numbers performed by Lulu for the United Kingdom's entry to the Eurovision Song Contest. The song placed fifth with Boom Bang-a-Bang winning the votes. Gloria's version of Are You Ready for Love was issued on Hawkshaw's Tangerine record label on 23 May 1969, duly earning her a Top 10 hit in the Ulster charts.

In Ireland, Gloria was in constant demand as a singer during the late 1960s and early 70s, performing frequently on television, in cabaret and concert. Gloria even supported both Roy Orbison and Tiny Tim when the American hitmakers toured there in 1969. Such was her popularity that she hosted her own musical television specials for Ireland's RTE channel and her own concert special for the series Caught in the Act filmed at Dublin's Cabra Grand Cinema in 1971. "At whatever level I was going to be a singer, I just wanted to be a singer. Cabaret was very important for me at this time. When the Troubles broke out in Northern Ireland, you'd be booked to perform at a club, and it would be bombed the night before, so it was always very precarious."

It was while promoting Are You Ready for Love in 1969 that the trajectory of Gloria's career forged a new path. "I was brought in to be interviewed about the record on Northern Ireland's equivalent of the Today programme. After the show, I was asked by the producer, Dan Gilbert, if I'd ever thought of a career in broadcasting, something I had never considered. Dan wanted to bring in a female interviewer and asked me to come back for an interview.

"At the interview I thought he just wanted to talk about the logistics of it all, but to my surprise, he handed me a Uher tape recorder, and promptly asked me to do a test interview with Cicely Matthews. I felt it had gone terribly, but when I got home that night, I got a call asking when I could start. I can never refuse a challenge, so I said: 'I'm available as from tomorrow.' And that's the attitude I still have today."

Gloria's broadcasting career in Northern Ireland now flourished. She went on to present her own mid-morning programme A Taste of Hunni and, in 1978, hosted television's Good Evening, Ulster interviewing stars like Elton John, David Essex and Rod Stewart. "While now broadcasting in Northern Ireland, I was still doing all the gigs. I combined radio everyday with singing at night and bringing up my three children."

In 1978, Gloria appeared in the critically acclaimed Stephen Sondheim revue Side by Side by Sondheim at the Arts Theatre, Belfast. "I loved doing Side by Side by Sondheim. I heard the London cast recording and played it constantly. Roy Heayberd, creative director of the Arts Theatre, Belfast brought the revue to Northern Ireland and we had just three weeks to learn it. I used to rehearse the songs at home all the time, and my daughter, Caron, heard it so much from her room that she knew it as well as I did."

In late 1978, Gloria made a welcome return to the recording studio to record a new solo album Good Evening… The LP featured a collection of timeless, popular standards and evergreens. Produced and arranged by Eurovision veteran Noel Kelehan, the album effectively showcased Gloria as a gifted song stylist and astute interpreter of lyrics. Highlights from the album sessions included The Way We Were, Feelings, You Are the Sunshine of My Life, and Give the Children Back Their Childhood, a song dear to Gloria and one she revisited in 1988, rerecording the track for Children in Need.

The release of the Good Evening… LP was also, indirectly, responsible for the next chapter in Gloria's career. On a trip to London after the album's release, she instigated a meeting with Charles McLelland and David Hatch, the controllers at BBC Radio 2 in the hope of getting some airplay for the record. "At the meeting, they asked if I listened to Radio 2, which I did, and what I thought was wrong with it. My immediate answer was that they didn't have any women on the network broadcasting. Two years later, they came looking for me."

Gloria made a lasting impression at that meeting, as in 1981, completely out of the blue, McLelland and Hatch offered her the opportunity to host Radio 2's The Jimmy Young Show for two weeks, a programme with eight million daily listeners. Gloria was a natural fit on the programme and at the end of those two weeks was offered her own show on Radio 2, breaking the glass ceiling and becoming the first female broadcaster at the station to have their own daily show. The Gloria Hunniford Show launched in January 1982, and Gloria remained at the station for the next 13 years.

With Gloria now broadcasting daily to the nation on BBC Radio 2, Ritz Records took the opportunity to reissue her Good Evening… album. Now retitled A Taste of Hunni, the repackaged collection hit shops in November 1982 to positive reviews with trade magazine Record Business likening her voice to Anne Murray. Promoting the record, Gloria made a handful of guest television spots singing on programmes like The Val Doonican Music Show and The Karen Kay Show. Gloria appeared on Val Doonican's popular variety show several times in the 1980s and even duetted with Doonican at the 1986 Royal Variety Show. In fact, Gloria has sung at the Royal Variety Show on three separate occasions: in 1982, 1985 and 1986.

In a 2021 BBC documentary dedicated to Gloria's career, she referenced the A Taste of Hunni album as a project she was extremely "proud of". Now the recording is receiving its very first release on CD. "I'm led by lyrics and have always been influenced by lyricists. When I listened back to the album, what stood out for me was the balance, the fact you can hear every word. I'm really proud of the record, the songs will never die, and never go out of fashion."

This year, Gloria celebrates her 85th birthday and shows absolutely no sign of slowing down. Whether debating with her Loose Women colleagues or tackling the issues affecting the nation on Rip Off Britain, she remains one of Britain's foremost figures in broadcasting. On reflection, Gloria's trailblazing career has been groundbreaking in every sense, paving the way for women on radio and television. A career that's truly inspiring and one that's always been underpinned by music. An incredible journey for the three-year-old girl from Portadown who aspired to be a singer.

"My ambition as a youngster was always to be a singer, so with this album reissue everything has come full circle."

A TASTE OF HUNNI
GLORIA HUNNIFORD

A Taste of Hunni will be released by Stage Door Records (stagedoorrecords.com) on 21 February.

PAUL BURTON
Goodnight Sweetheart
A GUIDE TO THE CLASSIC SITCOM

Songs of Love

Kate Garner shares her love affair with vintage music and the history behind some romantic songs

Behind every great song, there's a great story. Who or what was the inspiration? What was the journey from the seed of an idea to a timeless classic? How did the song change the lives of the writer, the performer and those with whom it struck a magical chord?

My dear dad was Chas Hodges, from pop duo Chas & Dave, and I grew up surrounded by music, from singalongs around the piano at family parties, to the life-changing moment when my dad bought me a gramophone and a box of 78s from a flea market when I was 12, and my love affair with vintage music was born.

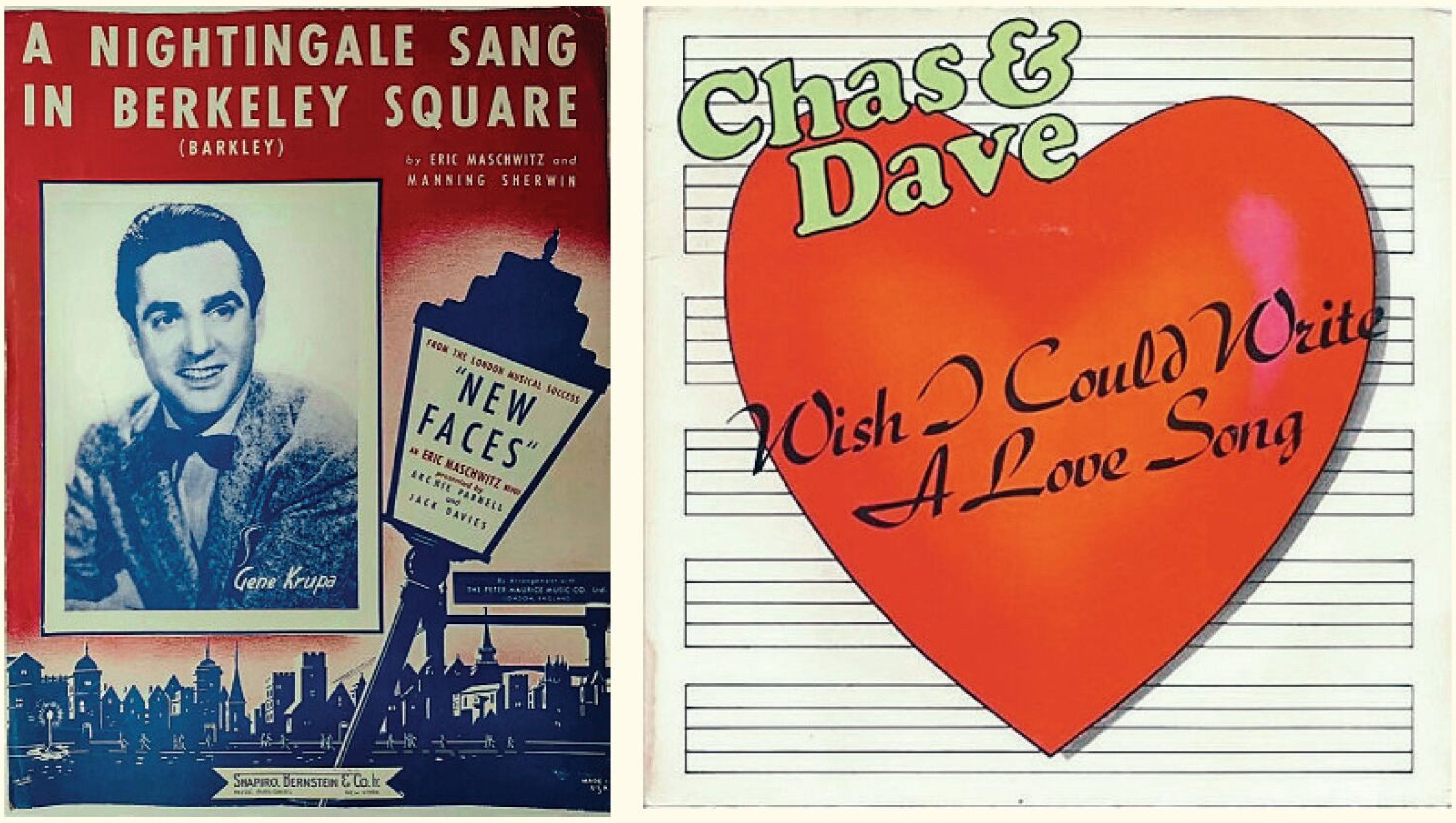
Most of the music in that box was from the 1930s, which was a particularly prominent decade for songs about love. But there are thousands, maybe millions, throughout history. And yet, as a songwriter, I think love songs are the trickiest songs to write.

I've written a fair few songs but only one love song – that was for my husband Paul called Picnics and Planes. It tells the story of our many trips to Windsor Great Park where we would pack a picnic (and our dogs Ralph and Millie) and spend the day walking and watching the planes flying overhead to exciting destinations while planning our own travel adventures. It didn't cost much but it was one of the most romantic things in the world and was, without a doubt, worth writing a song about.

I like love songs that are more creative in their message, which is why I was smitten on first hearing A Nightingale Sang in Berkeley Square. It's a lovely song to sing – in fact, I once found myself walking in Berkeley Square and couldn't resist bursting into song. Usually, it's the dove that gets mentioned in songs about love, so why the nightingale? Though a beautiful singer, it's rather a shy bird, usually heard in quiet country churchyards and unlikely to be spotted singing in the middle of London. But that's just it. The song tells the story of a

Top: Kate with Elizabeth Carling who played Phoebe in time-travel sitcom Goodnight Sweetheart.

Photographs: Kate Garner


A NIGHTINGALE SANG IN BERKELEY SQUARE
(BARKLEY)
by ERIC MASCHWITZ and MANNING SHERWIN
FROM THE LONDON MUSICAL SUCCESS
"NEW FACES"
AN ERIC MASCHWITZ REVUE
ARCHIE PARNELL and JACK DAVIES
Gene Krupa
SHAPIRO, BERNSTEIN & Co. Inc
Chas & Dave
Wish I Could Write A Love Song

Left: Telling of a couple in love and the ethereal sights encountered in the middle of Mayfair, A Nightingale Sang in Berkeley Square was actually written in a small French fishing village. Right: Wish I Could Write a Love Song was released by Chas & Dave in 1982.

couple in love and the ethereal sights encountered in the middle of Mayfair, angels dining at The Ritz and the song of a nightingale – all appearing before them like a musical mirage.

The lyrics were written by British entertainer and broadcaster Eric Maschwitz and the music by American composer Manning Sherwin. Rather surprisingly, it was conceived in Le Lavandou, a small French fishing village on the Côte d'Azur where the writers were having a working holiday. It was just before war broke out in 1939, a time when a piece of pure escapism was much needed.

It was hoped a commemorative blue plaque could be placed at the French bar where it was first performed by the writers but, alas, the bar was never found. Maybe, like the nightingale, it was all part of the lovers' dream.

You will recognise the next song from the television series of the same name. The song Goodnight Sweetheart had humble beginnings when those loving words were overheard uttered on board a London bus: "Dreams enfold you in each one I'll hold you; Goodnight sweetheart, goodnight." Picture the scene – a late evening in London 1931, a couple in love aboard a bus. The woman kisses her man "Goodnight" and, as she hops off, he utters the loving farewell "Goodnight, sweetheart."

British dance band leader and composer Ray Noble happened to be on that bus and, as he heard these simple words, he must have smiled to himself as inspiration struck… there's a title for a song. Ray took the title to his songwriting team Jimmy Campbell and Reg Connelly and together they wrote what was to become Ray's first major hit record. He could apply his talent to any musical field. Aged just 19, he won a Melody Maker arranging award and went on to become a composer, bandleader, pianist and radio host. He even turned his hand to TV and film and was one of the first musical entertainers to achieve success in the US.

Popular 1930s crooner, and heartthrob of the day, Al Bowlly helped make this song famous when he recorded it with Ray Noble's band. It's a beautiful arrangement from Ray, beginning with a solo guitar, gently plucked, then Al's warm and sublime vocals glide along, effortlessly complemented by the band. The lyrics are powerful in their simplicity. Melancholic thoughts are suggested by the title but it is also reassuring in the same way as We'll Meet Again, parting company but not forever.

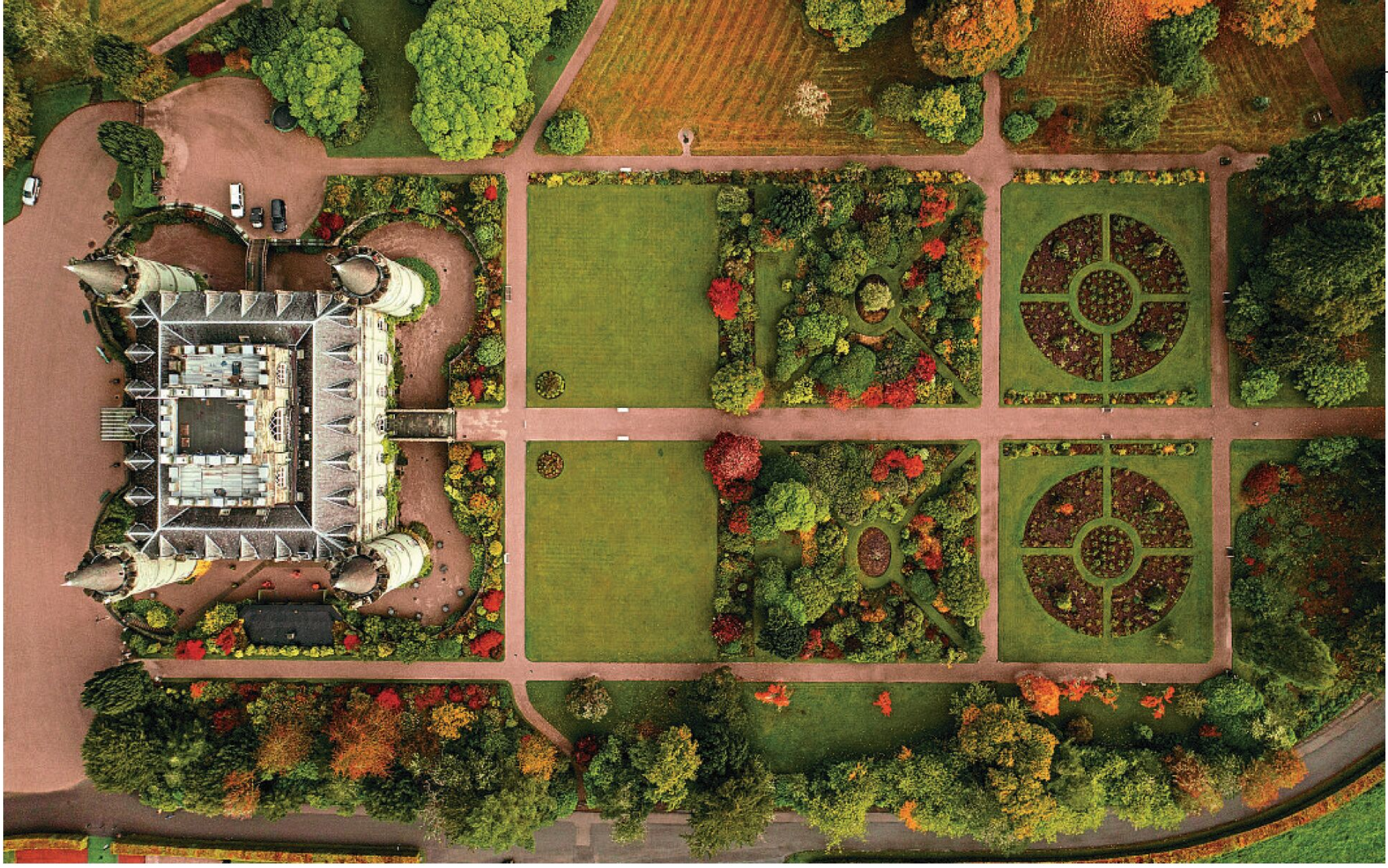
It was more recently during the 1990s that Goodnight Sweetheart achieved household recognition when comedy writing duo Laurence Marks and Maurice Gran created the BBC hit time-travel sitcom of the same name. Goodnight Sweetheart, starring Nicholas Lyndhurst, featured the song as its theme tune, sung by Nick Curtis.

Last summer, I was invited to The Nell of Old Drury in Covent Garden to perform wartime songs at a book launch for Goodnight Sweetheart, a new publication about the television series from television historian Paul Burton. You may remember a nice storyline from the show in which Noël Coward pays a visit. Actor David Benson, who played the role of Coward, was at the event and got up and sang London Pride (as Mr Coward, of course) with me accompanying him. It was great fun. The afternoon concluded with all the cast and creatives around the piano singing Goodnight Sweetheart. It was such a special moment that I shall never forget.

Let's have one more song for the road: Wish I Could Write a Love Song by Chas & Dave. My childhood was filled with music, and lots of Chas & Dave songs. I'm often asked what it was like growing up in such a musical household. Well, it was pretty special as I learned so much about songwriting as it was all around me. Dave would turn up on his bike and my dad and he would get their heads into writing a song. Witnessing that writing process really struck a chord with me as I knew from an early age that, when I grew up, I wanted to be a songwriter. Music brings people together and brings joy.

Wish I Could Write a Love Song is a beautiful ballad with an equally beautiful story behind it as it was inspired by the words my dad wrote to my mum in an anniversary card. More than 40 years old, its lyrics are written in a conversational style like many of their songs, but the last line (and my favourite) says it all, as to why they "can't" write a love song (which in fact they subconsciously have). "Perhaps it's simply that I love you more than words can say…"

Kate Garner is a singer-songwriter and presenter of the television series The Stories Behind the Songs. Watch all episodes of the Talking Pictures TV series at tptvencore.co.uk and hear the latest news and Kate's music via kategarnermusic.co.uk



And the Winner Is...

Claire Saul looks at the winners of a prestigious annual award that celebrates grand stately homes, gardens and more

Through two organisations alone, the National Trust and English Heritage, we have more than 900 historic places to visit, from grand stately homes and gardens to coastal spots, urban dwellings, monuments and bunkers. Enriching this choice even further are the member sites of the Historic Houses association, hundreds of independently owned houses, castles and gardens which open their doors to visitors for days out or places to stay, tours, school visits, filming and private events. Properties range from well-known stately homes such as Blenheim Palace, Castle Howard, Woburn Abbey and Burghley, to houses such as Traquair and Treowen.

Towards the end of last year, the Historic Houses organisation announced the winners of five prestigious annual awards celebrating excellence in key areas. The first of these was for Garden of the Year, an award designed to recognise the importance of some of the country's most spectacular gardens with outstanding horticultural and public appeal. From a shortlist which also featured notable sites such as Pembrokeshire's Picton Castle and Hever Castle and Gardens in Kent, the general public voted 18th century turreted castle Inveraray Castle & Gardens in Argyll as their 2024 winner. The property, seat of the Clan Campbell and home to the Dukes of Argyll, welcomes around 85,000 guests every year. Its garden spans 16 acres of stunning formal lawns, flowerbeds, parkland, and woodland.

The Judge's Choice Award, given to a garden considered to embody excellence on a smaller scale, went to Belcombe Court in Bradford-on-Avon, Wiltshire. Over three decades, the gardens there have been returned to their former glory, with many contemporary additions.

Grade II-listed Glyn Cywarch, Gwynedd located within Snowdonia National Park, was crowned winner of the 2024 Restoration Award, which recognises outstanding protection and preservation work. Over four centuries, the house had become highly dilapidated, with significant damp ingress and collapsed ceilings. The results of an extensive seven-year restoration using traditional materials and master craftspeople, includes the

Top: Winner of Garden of the Year was 18th century turreted castle Inveraray Castle & Gardens in Argyll. Its garden spans 16 acres of formal lawns, parkland, and woodland. Left: A rare silk doublet and trunkhose at Grimsthorpe Castle, Park and Gardens may have been worn by Robert Bertie, 13th Lord Willoughby de Eresby at the coronation of James I in 1603.

Photographs: (Glyn Cywarch) Glyn Cywarch, (Grimsthorpe Castle) Grimsthorpe Castle, (Haddon Hall) Haddon Hall, (Inveraray Castle) Inveraray Castle, (Ushaw) Ushaw Historic House, Chapel and Gardens

Left: Sustainability is at the heart of Haddon Hall and practices include repurposing fallen oak from the park for the creation of furniture. Right: An extensive restoration was carried out at Glyn Cywarch using traditional materials and master craftspeople.

repair and reslating of the gatehouse roof, improved thermal insulation of the building and renewable heating in the form of a water source heat pump.

Much of the work was conducted during the Covid pandemic, which increased the complexity and cost of the project, but Historic Houses director general Ben Cowell deems the result to be an "a fantastic achievement", and "an excellent example of how a house can be brought back to life and made ready for 21st century living".

Ushaw Historic House, Chapels and Gardens in Durham won the 2024 Frances Garnham Award for Education, recognising innovative learning and outreach. Since April 2021, the team have run a weekly forest school in the gardens of the former Catholic seminary, helping hundreds of children to learn more about the world around them among a community of likeminded families. Ushaw's young visitors have been able to engage in a range of arts and wellbeing activities and have benefitted from a free, healthy meal, as part of its fun and food funding initiative. As part of Ushaw's wider commitment to support local families, complimentary annual memberships have been awarded to those entitled to free school meals in nearby schools, encouraging visitors who have not previously been inside a heritage building.

Sustainability is an important consideration in every sphere of life and historic houses are no exception. Scooping the 2024 award in this category was the Grade I-listed medieval manor house and garden Haddon Hall, near Bakewell in Derbyshire, home to Lord and Lady Edward Manners, and not only a visitor favourite but also a popular filming location for period dramas. The sustainability award is a benchmark for excellence and recognition of environmental best practice within the heritage sector and considers factors such as the reduction of carbon footprint, eco-tourism and sustainable development, biodiversity, and habitat management. Sustainability and environmental best practice is at the heart of Haddon Hall and practices include the employment of local craftsmen working in traditional materials obtained from the estate for maintenance and restoration, such as the use of river silt to make lime plaster in the kiln and repurposing fallen oak from the park for the creation of desks and other furniture.

A weekly forest school is held in the gardens of Ushaw Historic House, Chapels and Gardens.

The Collections Award honoured those who preserve, augment, restore and interpret the objects on show inside the country's historic houses, enabling the public to understand and enjoy them and their stories. Grimsthorpe Castle, Park and Gardens near Bourne in Lincolnshire claimed the 2024 prize. It is a property which has been owned by the Willoughby family for more than 500 years and is home to a fine collection of items relating to England's monarchs.

Recent work on the collection highlights the importance of ensuring that correct environments for display enable the team to tell new stories. It has centred around the conservation and display of a rare silk doublet and trunkhose thought to belong to Robert Bertie, 13th Lord Willoughby de Eresby, later 1st Marquess of Lindsey, and may have been worn by him to the coronation of James I in 1603. With reference to other items in Grimsthorpe's collection, such as paintings, books and archival letters, this very personal item was shown to be a central tool in interpreting Bertie's character and preoccupations and in understanding him as one of the most influential military leaders of his time.

There is so much to explore in every nook and cranny of Britain. Wherever you go, enjoy your grand days out.

Find Out More

Historic Houses: visitor membership available (01462 896688, historichouses.org)
Inveraray Castle: reopens 27 March (01499 302203, inveraray-castle.com)
Belcombe Court: check for visiting news (07834 896823, belcombe.com)
Glyn Cywarch: check for visiting news (01766 781130, glyncywarch.co.uk)
Ushaw: open daily (0191 373 8500, ushaw.org)
Haddon Hall: reopens in March (01629 812855, haddonhall.co.uk)
Grimsthorpe: reopens this spring (01778 591205, grimsthorpe.co.uk)

BEST OF BRITISH
puzzle page

Twenty Questions

How well do you know Britain – Past and Present? Test your knowledge with our February quiz

1. Who played DCI Jim Taggart in the drama series Taggart?
2. Who was the star of the sitcom Dear John?
3. Which former Vinegar Joe singer had a Top 10 single with Pearl's a Singer?
4. Who won a best actress Golden Globe and a Bafta for the film Educating Rita?
5. Which musician was accompanied in the 1980s by the mime artist Jed Hoile?
6. What was the only non-American aircraft carrier to operate the McDonnell Douglas Phantom at sea?
7. Which former Coronation Street script writer created the television dramas Clocking Off, State of Play and Shameless?
8. By what name was comic actor Arthur Stanley Jefferson better known?
9. Who, with director Edgar Wright, co-wrote the films Shaun of the Dead, Hot Fuzz and The World's End?
10. Which comic writer created "the Blandings Castle Saga"?
11. By which name was The Goon Show bandleader Henry Pitts Brown better known?
12. Who, with Emeric Pressburger, made films such as The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp, A Matter of Life and Death, Black Narcissus and The Red Shoes?
13. Who wrote the screenplays for Lawrence of Arabia, Doctor Zhivago, A Man for All Seasons and Ryan's Daughter?
14. Which fictional character, the subject of a series of novels and their film adaptations, started life in a newspaper column first published in The Independent on 28 February 1995?
15. Who was the oldest footballer to represent in England and play in its top division?
16. Who, with Dame Cleo Laine, founded The Stables music venue in Milton Keynes?
17. Which actress is best known for playing Mrs Fox in Dad's Army?
18. Who, with her husband Teddy Johnson, represented the UK at the 1959 Eurovision Song Contest?
19. Which The Army Game star is best known for playing Radio West's owner, Don Satchley, in the drama series Shoestring?
20. Who played "nice grandma" Nelly Buller in the sitcom Friday Night Dinner?

And I quote…

Whose "success in lawn tennis", according to his obituary in The Times, "was built on qualities which did not always recommend themselves to the socially-conscious ethos of the All England Club as it was in the 1930s?"

Dialect Detective

Britain has many wonderful regional dialects. Can you spot the correct definition for each of these examples?

1. Sunkets (*Norfolk*)
a) A great number
b) Dainty bits
c) Rods or switches

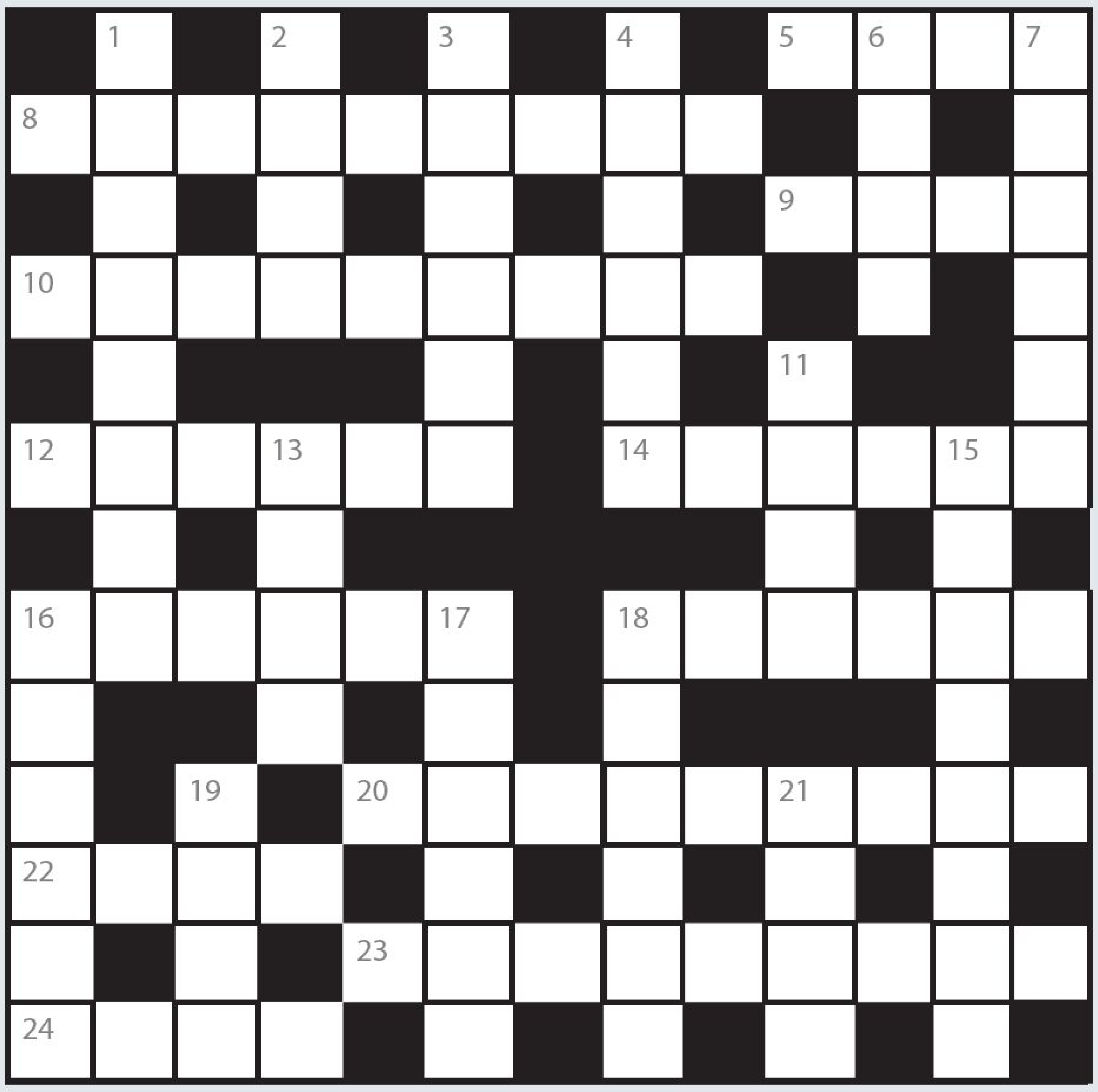
2. Hodemedod (*Somerset*)
a) Like a snail
b) The game of leapfrog
c) A tiny fellow

3. Froise (*Norfolk*)
a) A pancake
b) An edge tool
c) A kick

4. Prinked (Exmoor)
a) Wickerwork
b) Peevish
c) Well-dressed

Cryptic Crossword

Compiled by CADOC



Across

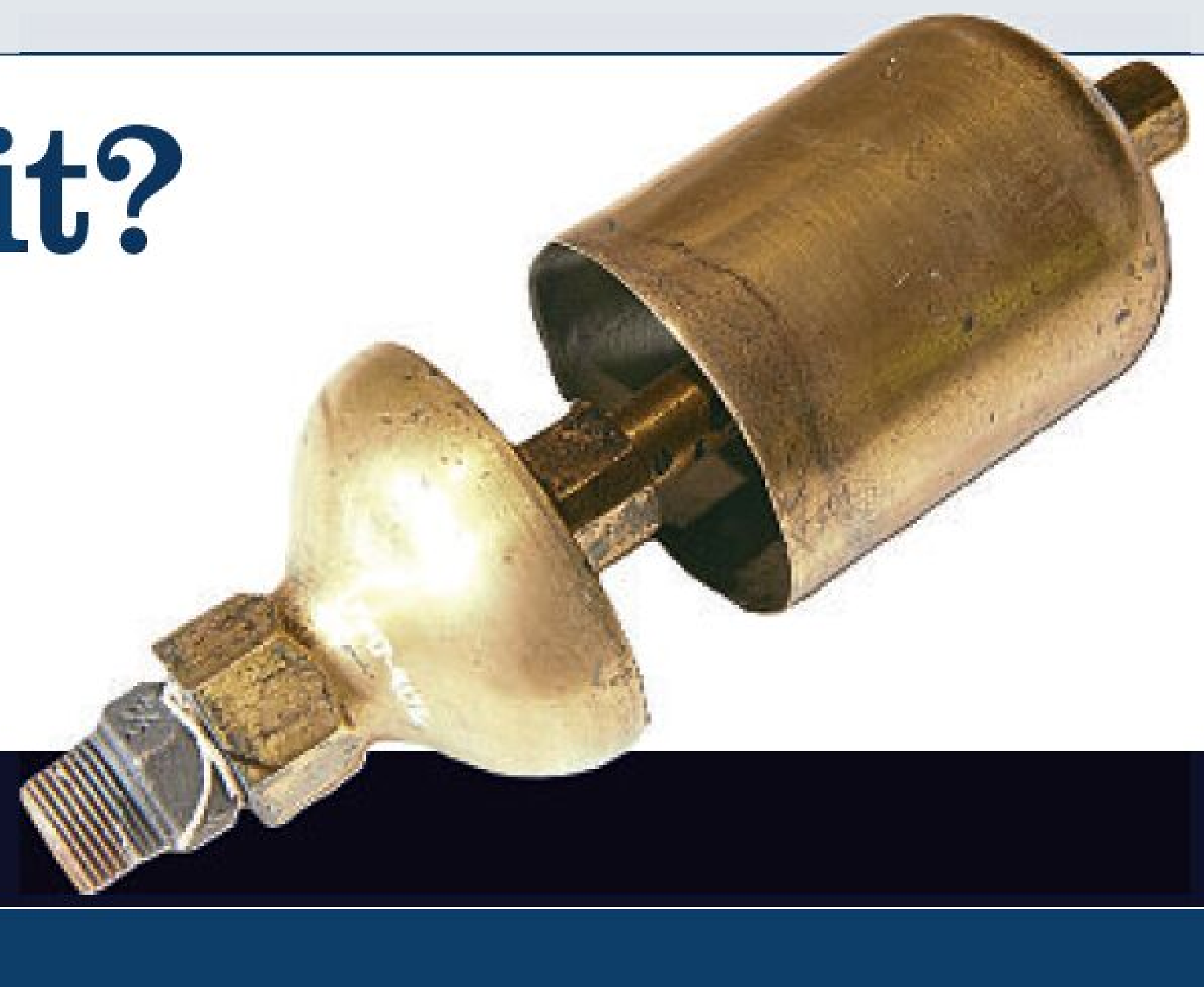
5. Mamma Mia – they are found in fab band (4)
8 and 9 Across. Awfully tired paw shown in 1978 film (9,4)
10. Crazy host found at Lord's, no doubt (5,4)
12. Ford product I feast off (6)
14. Seat principally part of uncomfortable furniture found everywhere (6)
16. I used to play it at school? Quite the reverse (6)
18. Checker who was a real twister (6)
20. One of the soap stars who lived next door (9)
22. He tells a copper Noah at the beginning has boat (4)
23. Merman and Trautmann get together to discover old English king (9)
24. A toy for highly-strung children (2,2)

Down

1. He fought against Cromwell in a flamboyant manner (8)
2. She wasn't a temp with a haircut like that (4)
3. What the Spaniards call home (6)
4. Decide finally to find company at university (4,2)
6. Was Michael Elphick's part a blessing? (4)
7. Unfasten after a ... BBC nickname (6)
11. When singing Shout she had a primarily lovely uplifting lilt usually (4)
13. It's rubbished now but I loved it in sandwiches (4)
15. Bare fury is spread about in this month (8)
16 and 17 Down. I had very good eyesight 5 years ago (6,6)
18. NY cage is put around chap who allegedly said: "You dirty rat" (6)
19. Sounds like the woman who was in Star Trek, or old city (4)
21. Best of British sterling starts to reveal old coins (4)

What is it?

Steam's up, make a noise



The solutions to this month's puzzles are on page 72 mortons books

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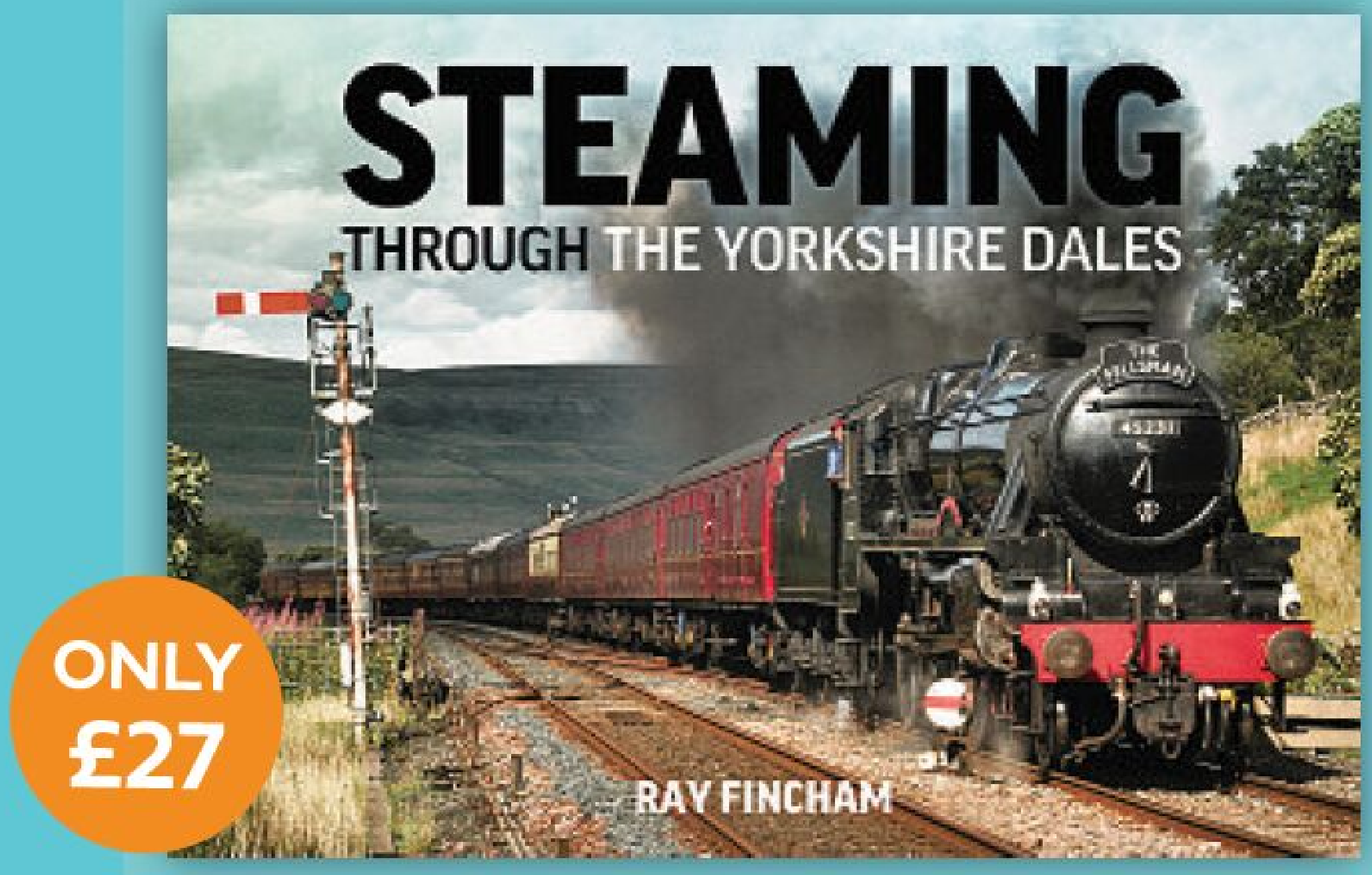
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By Ray Fincham

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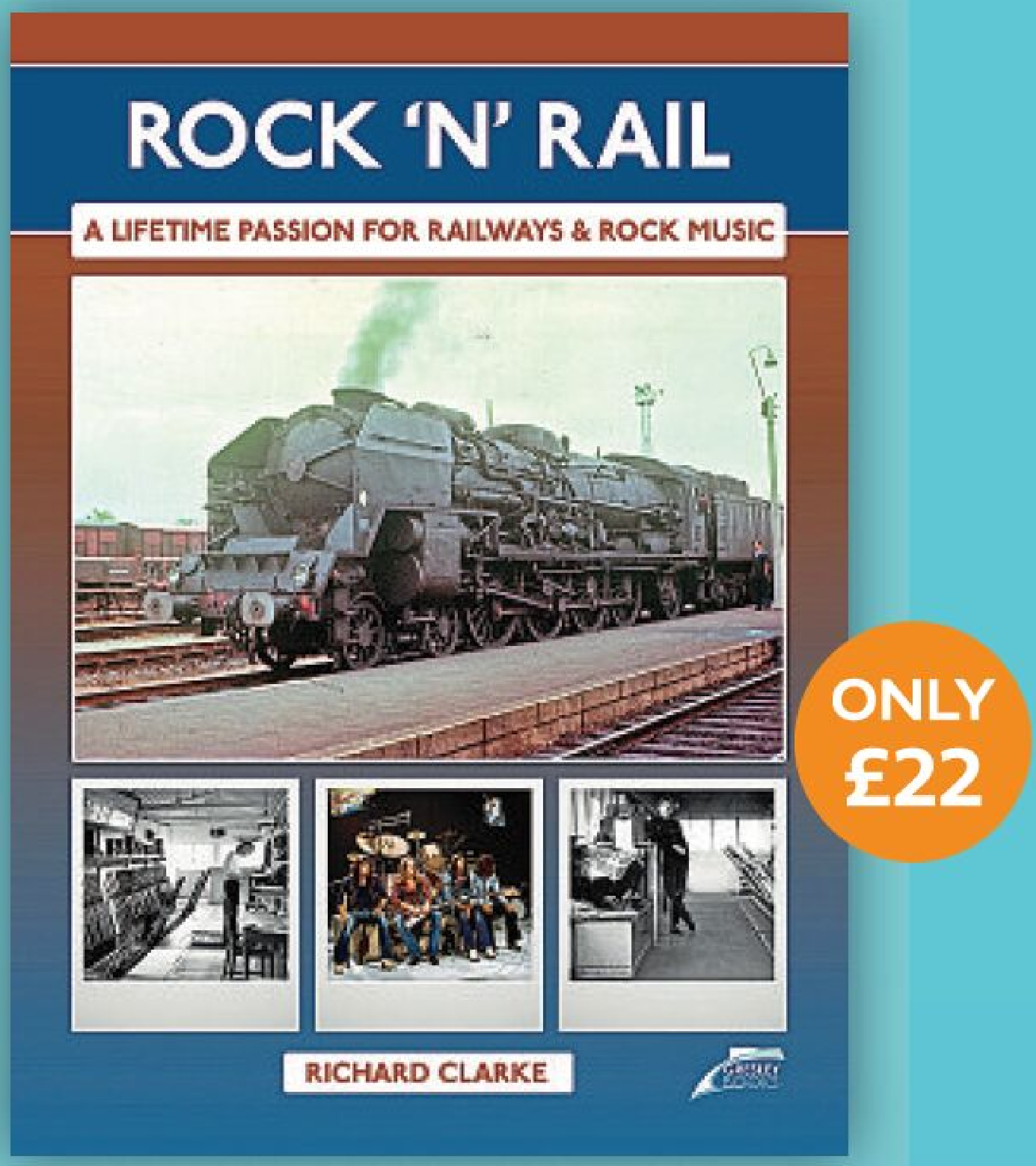
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Rock 'n' Rail

By Richard Clarke

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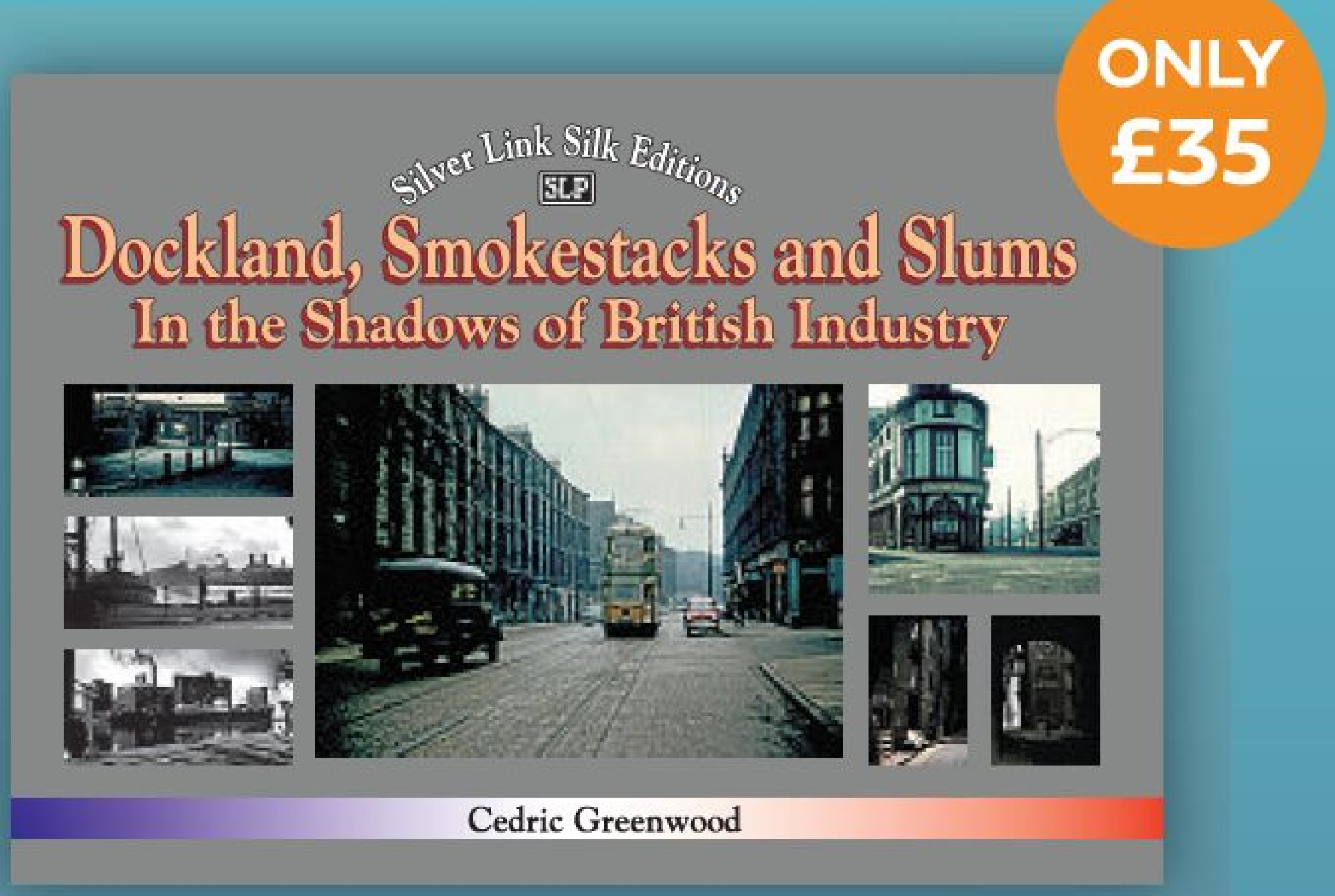
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by Cedric Greenwood

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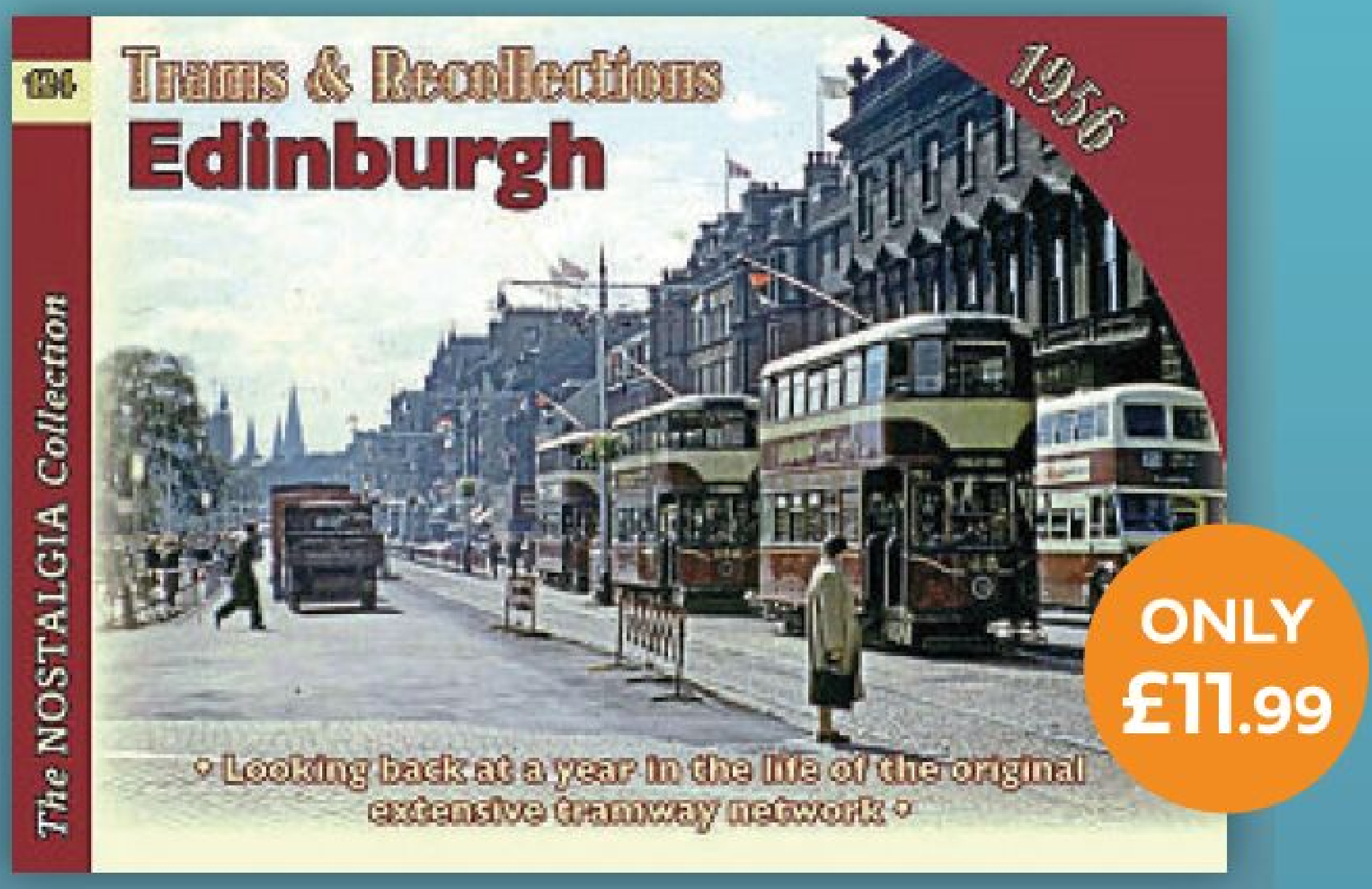
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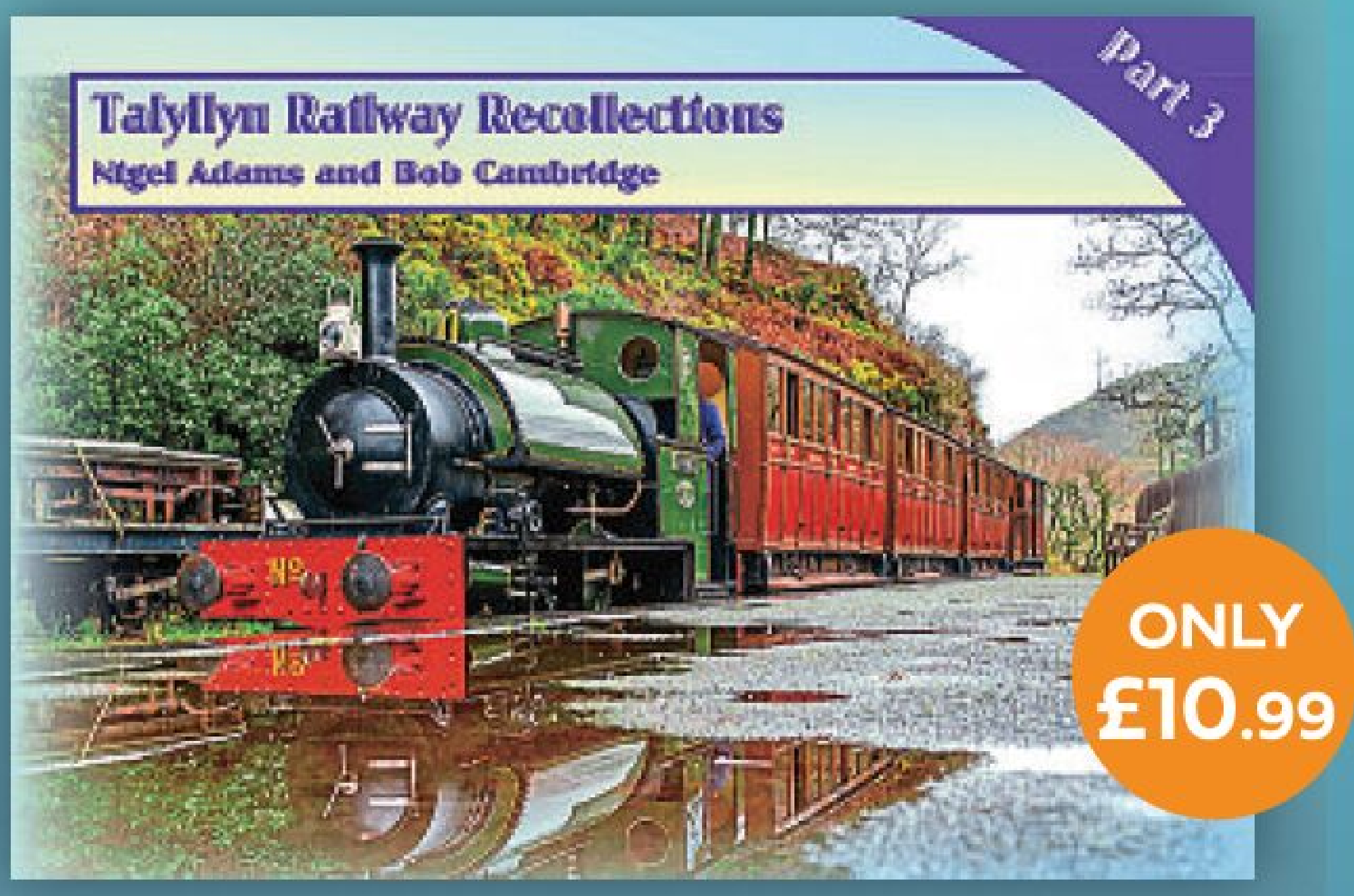
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WHAT OUR READERS SAY ABOUT *BEST OF BRITISH*

★★★★★

Excellent variety of nostalgia, information and illustrations – my favourite magazine in fact.
MR C KENNETT, DUNSTABLE

★★★★★

The range of topics covered in the magazine never ceases to amaze me. Keep it up.
PETER J GASKIN, IPSWICH

★★★★★

I have been reading your great mag for years, keep up the great work.
RAY GRIFFITHS, GRIMSBY

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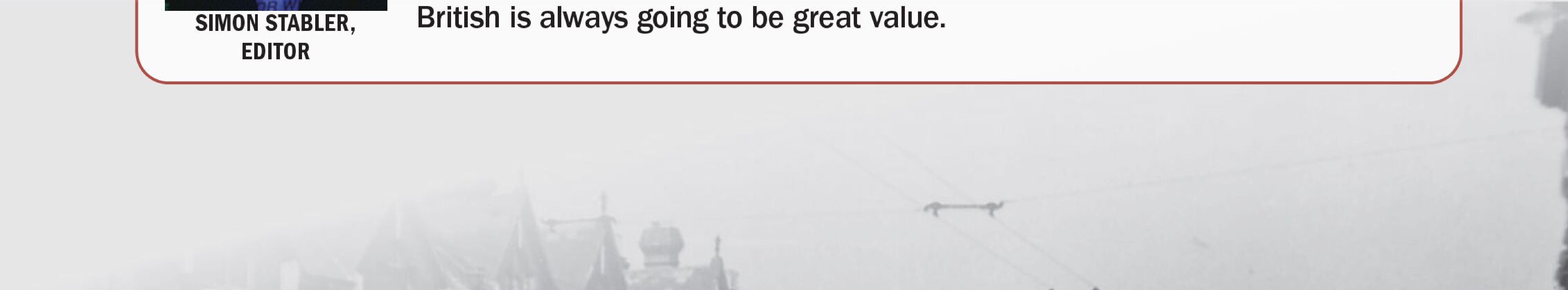
THE UK's TOP NOSTALGIA MONTHLY

BEST OF BRITISH

PAST AND PRESENT

SIMON STABLER, EDITOR

Best of British is the UK's premier nostalgia magazine, covering every aspect of life from the 1930s to today. Packed with features that celebrate classic entertainment, transport, food and drink, and more, not to mention Postbag and the Yesterday Remembered memoir section, a subscription to Best of British is always going to be great value.



WHY YOU SHOULD READ BEST OF BRITISH EVERY MONTH

» Interviews with the stars of classic TV, film and music » A lively Postbag and Yesterday Remembered section » Images and memories from The Francis Frith Collection » Plan great days out with Postcard from... and Out & About » Guess the values of our Treasures in the Attic » A trip down memory lane

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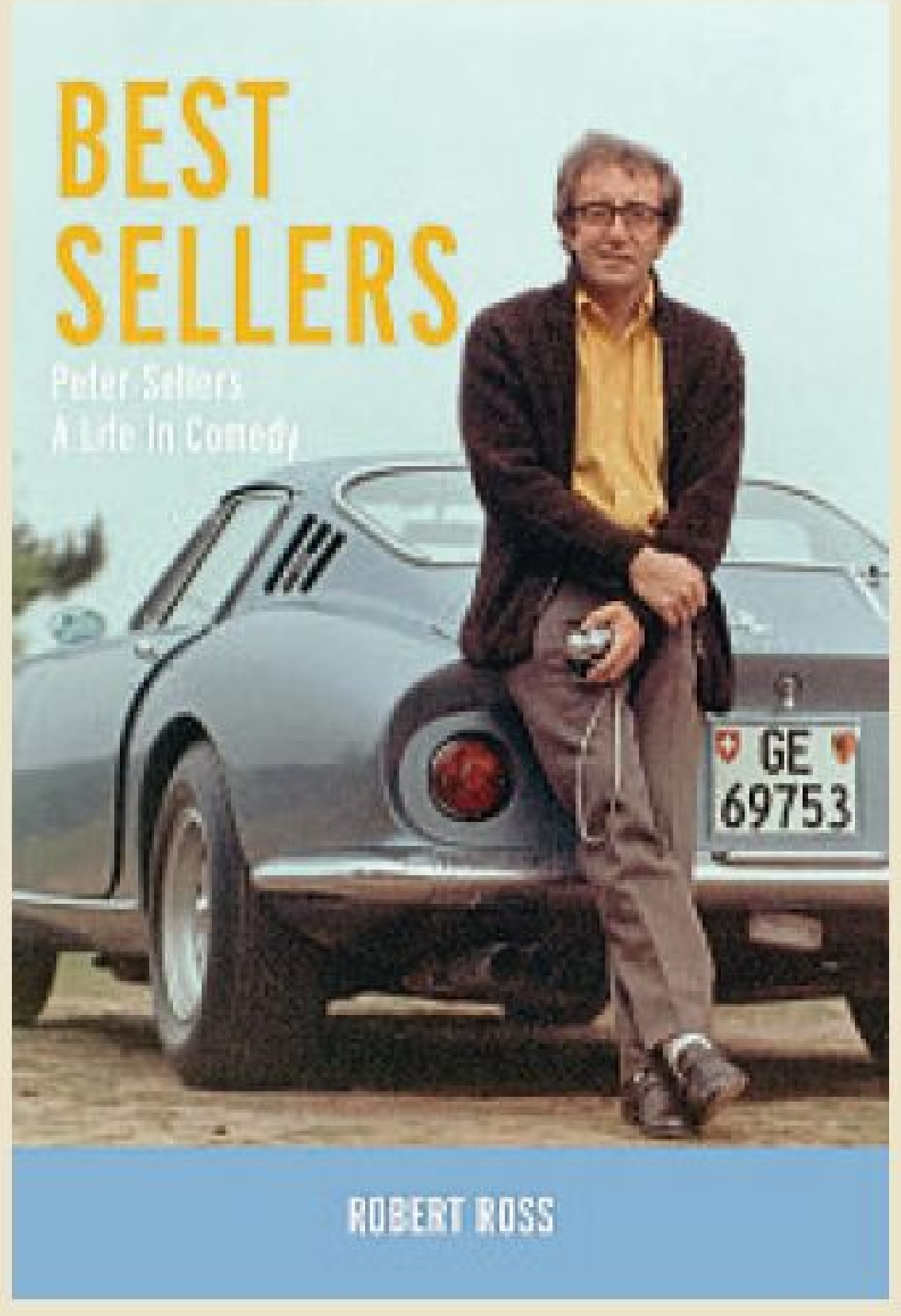
Bookshelf

David Brown checks out the latest releases

BOOK OF THE MONTH



Best Sellers: Peter Sellers – a Life in Comedy

By Robert Ross, Great Northern Books, hardback, £20

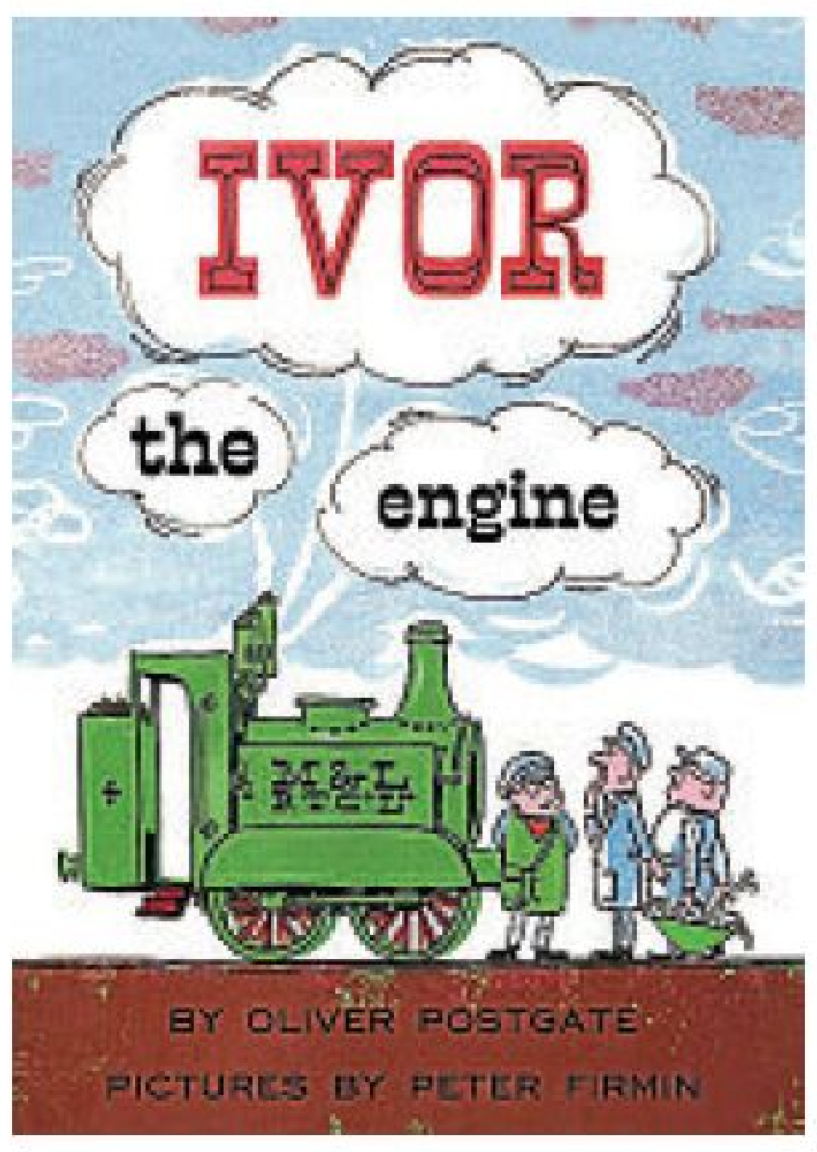
That Richard Henry Sellers, better known to us as Peter Sellers, was a special comedian and actor is widely acknowledged. The term "comic genius" is often used to describe a career that has been extensively examined in print and documentaries. He was not just a man of many faces and voices, as revealed in some magnificent film performances, balanced by some acknowledged turkeys.

Sellers' equally variable off-screen/stage persona has also been forensically dissected over the years, but Robert Ross sticks to his goal of describing his life in comedy, only touching open exterior aspects where it is relevant to the main business.

Our author first heard Sellers on the wireless as his father was a Goons fan, who had made the most of a weekly broadcast of inspired madness to lighten his National Service years with the RAF. Robert inherited his father's interest and the cover of a 1958 LP The Best of Sellers enabled him to put a face to the voices.

This interest indirectly led to this book, which Ross admits is a labour of love as he looked to answer many questions about Sellers by interviewing people who knew him and re-examining past pieces of a large jigsaw that shed light on some intriguing aspects of the man Spike Milligan defined as "one of the true comedy greats of the 20th century."

A study that is both enlightening and entertaining.



Ivor the Engine

By Oliver Postgate, Candy Jar Books, paperback, £12.99

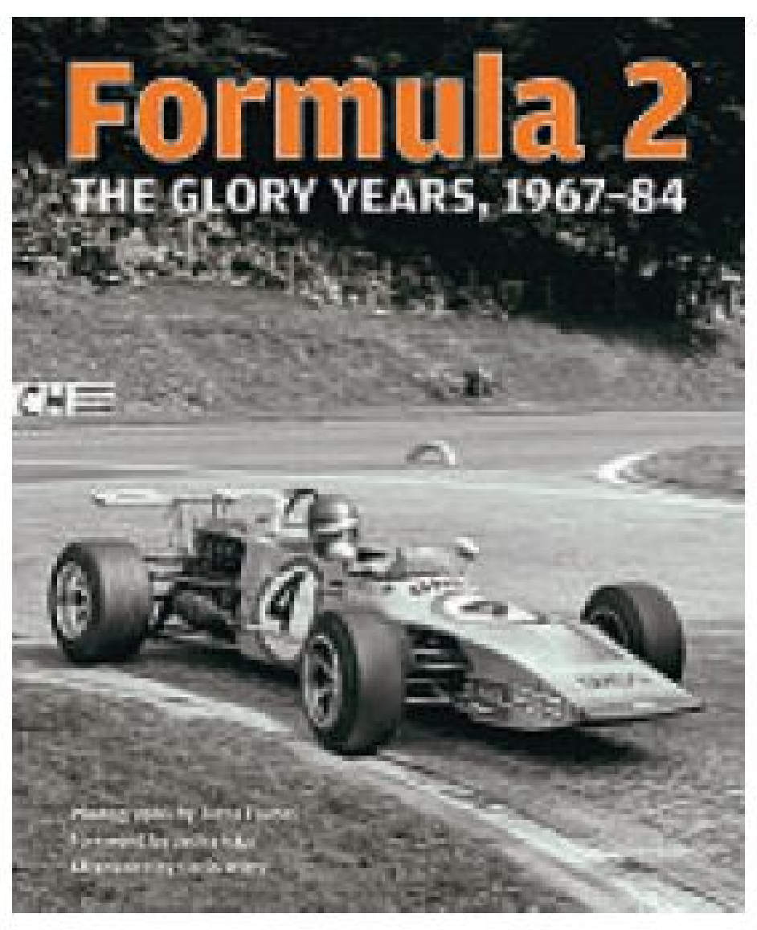
Many readers may remember Ivor the Engine from the classic children's television animated series by Oliver Postgate and Peter Firmin, who worked together for three decades on various subjects and characters.

Ivor's tales have remained popular with young readers and the book follows Ivor's first story in which the little engine is found to be not pulling right. After examining Ivor at his home on the Merioneth and Llantisilly Rail Traction Company Ltd branch, the decision is made that he should make a longer journey than he usually made on the compact system, along the main line for more exhaustive tests at Pontypool Roads.

After no progress was made, driver Jones the Steam headed for home with his little loco and up to Grumbly station, where Ivor's real concern was revealed. With the help of some friendly fairground folk, Ivor's ambition is eventually realised.

The original book, written by Postgate, with charming illustrations by Firmin, was published in 1962 and has been faithfully reprinted by Candy Jar Books, to allow a new generation of readers to enjoy the adventures of Ivor on his little branch line in the "top left-hand corner of Wales". With its industrial setting complete with coal pit and gasworks, it offers a history lesson from the time when coal was seen as a good thing to heat homes and power the nation's steam locomotives.

The end papers contain a map of the railway's layout which helps put everything in Ivor's story firmly in place. Excellent nostalgia.



Formula 2: The Glory Years: 1967-84

Photographs by Jutta Fausel, Evro Publishing, hardback, £95

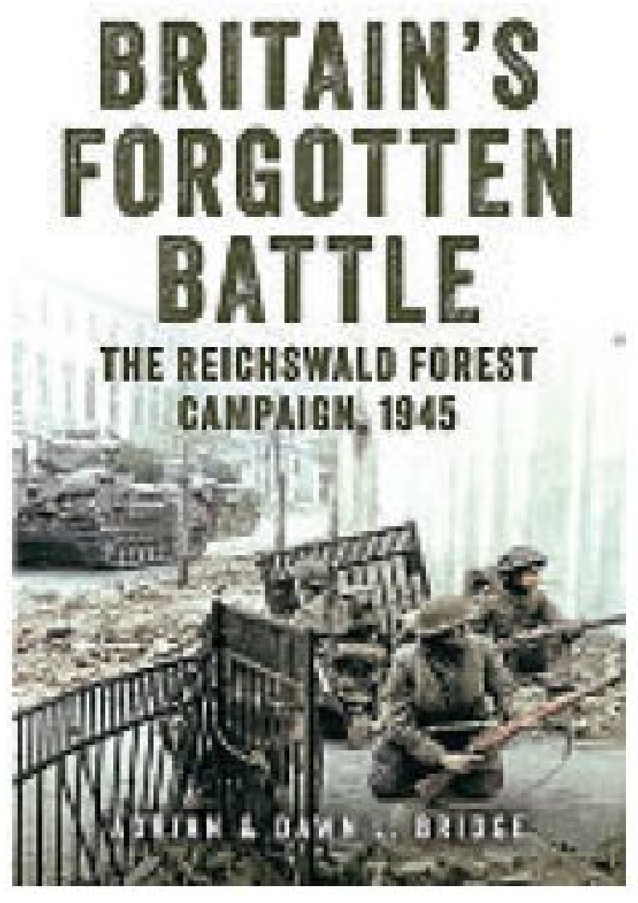
Formula Two (or Formula B) racing was officially inaugurated at the start of 1948 for smaller powered and less expensive cars than those involved in Grand Prix (Formula One) races, taking over from what had been known as "voiturette" racing. As such, it continued to thrive providing a valuable alternative for drivers, engine constructors and chassis designers and a stepping stone for Formula One hopefuls.

This excellent 560-page volume does indeed cover the glory years between 1967 and 1984 as recorded through the lens of German photographer Jutta Fausel, who contributed most of the 900 images presented here. Jutta kept busy in her work driving to European race circuits to record the action, usually in her VW Beetle. After each event she would drive home, often overnight, to develop and print her images before delivering them to magazines. The quality of these photographs is as impressive as the quantity.

The accompanying text is provided by Bob Constanduros, Peter Higham, Mark Hughes and Ian Phillips. The foreword is by Jacky Ickx, who became Formula Two champion driver in 1967 at the wheel of a Tyrrell-entered Matra, while Chris Witty adds an "afterword". Full details are provided of the races of the period covered, together with valuable plans of the racetracks.

After 1984, Formula Two was replaced with the Formula 3000 category. While the Formula Two title was revived (twice) in the 21st century, it was a very different set-up to the exhilarating scene covered here.

An excellent tribute to an exciting aspect of motor racing, gone but not forgotten.


BRITAIN'S FORGOTTEN BATTLE
THE REICHSWALD FOREST CAMPAIGN, 1945
ADRIAN & DAWN L. BRIDGE

Britain's Forgotten Battle: The Reichswald Forest Campaign, 1945

By Adrian & Dawn Leyland Bridge, Amberley Publishing, hardback, £22.99

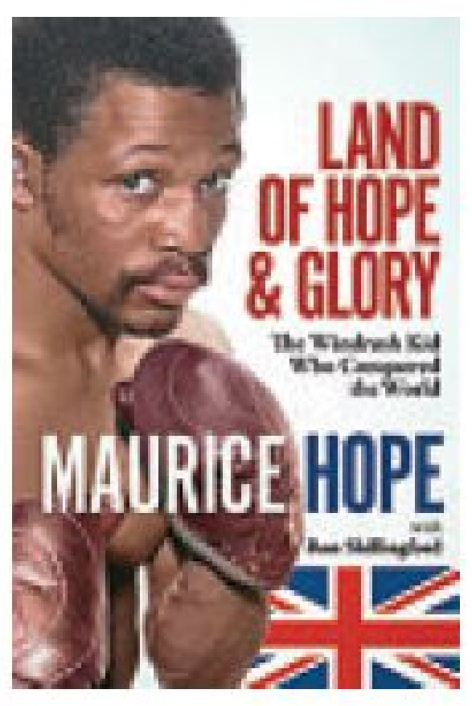
While several of the decisive battles towards the end of World War Two have been extensively covered and revisited in books, films and documentaries, there are some that are less well known. One of these is the Reichswald Forest Campaign, a drawn out, brutal fight that saw more than 200,000 service personnel brought in from Canadian and British forces in 1945.

It was not the battle to end all battles, but it helped turn the tide in the allies' favour at an important time of the conflict. The Germans were not going to give in easily; in fact, they fought as hard as they could, defending their ground yard by yard. As a result, the Germans lost an estimated 44,000 personnel, while the allies suffered around 16,000 casualties.

Operation Veritable, coming two months after the Battle of the Bulge, was the northern part of a pincer movement in Germany in the allies' vital push towards Berlin. The area between the River Maas and the Rhine included the Reichswald Forest and glacier with poor weather conditions and extensive mud restricting the effectiveness of air strikes and, on occasions, wheeled, and even tracked, vehicles struggled to get a grip.

In addition to providing a full account of the action via extensive research, the authors provide several valuable appendices including a useful section giving details of the armoured vehicles used by the allies, information on citations for the Victoria Cross, plus illustrations including useful detailed maps of the area.

A fascinating read that reveals a neglected piece of wartime history.



Land of Hope & Glory – The Windrush Kid Who Conquered the World

By Maurice Hope with Ron Shillingford, Pitch Publishing, hardback, £25

Maurice Hope became WBC light-middleweight world champion by knocking Rocky Mattioli out in the ninth round in San Remo, Italy in March 1979. Hope was the first black immigrant British boxer to win a world title.

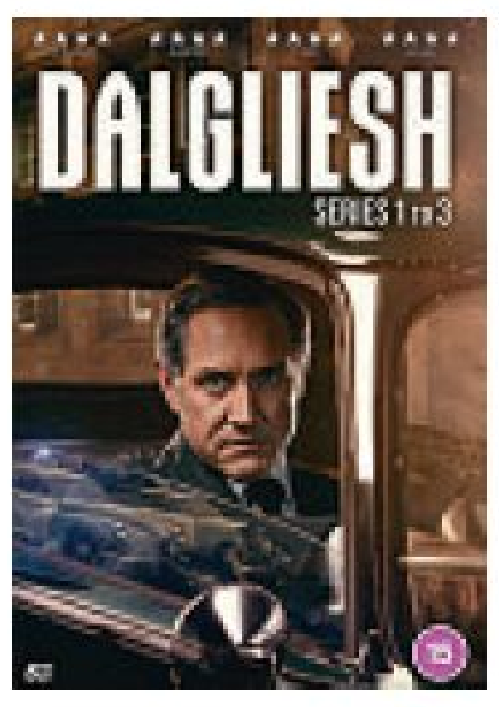
Back in 1972, Hope had been delighted to be in the Great Britain team at the 1972 Summer Olympics in Munich – an event infamous for its deadly terrorist attack, which he still thinks about and covers in the opening chapter of this book. He lost out in the quarter-finals at Munich to Hungarian boxer Janos Kadji.

If you'd have told some of his young friends and members of his family in his native Antigua that Hope would become a famous boxer, they might not have believed you. As a youngster, he was timid and likely to burst into tears at any moment. To toughen him up, his older brother, Lex, encouraged "Little Maurice" to wrestle other boys, but such aggression did not come easily to him.

After Hope moved to England, Lex persuaded him to join Repton Boxing Club where he honed his skills and developed a style of his own. Hope has always been modest about his skills and not a "loudmouth" like some pugilists.

After retiring from his varied life in the ring, Hope continued to help other boxers, encouraged youngsters and remains a proud ambassador for the sport and Antigua.

THAT'S ENTERTAINMENT



Dalgliesh: Series 1-3

DVD boxset, Acorn Media International, AV3790

To mark the successful third television series of Dalgliesh, Acorn has not only released the three programmes from this set of three thrillers on DVD, but also a trilogy featuring the three series to date with a total of nine full-length stories plus a few extras on six DVDs.

PD James' enigmatic detective inspector (subsequently promoted to commander with the Metropolitan Police), is convincingly portrayed by Bertie Carvel, looking and sounding the part. He represents a man who does not suffer fools among his colleagues and potential suspects. Nor does he rush to make conclusions, letting the facts rise to the surface before making his move. He takes a few knocks on the way, and it is perhaps surprising the murderers choose to take their victims while one of the Met's finest is in their midst.

PD James' stories are the very opposite of the "cosy murder mysteries" that are favoured in some contemporary detective series. Her characters and plots are deep and dense, the deaths could never be considered as cosy. They are calculated, vindictive and often grisly.

It is interesting to compare the series with previous depictions of our well-dressed detective driving an immaculate Jaguar E-Type, who has a fascinating alternative persona as a sensitive poet. We've seen some of these stories presented with Roy Marsden and Martin Shaw in the title role, but this set of interpretations can overall be seen as the best yet and are certainly worth watching in their entirety.

THE FUNNY COMICS FAN CLUB

The Funny Comics Fan Club

Podcast: thefcfc.podbean.com

Presented by the ever-entertaining Mark Hibbett and John Dredge, here's a fab treat for fans of traditional British comics. Each programme is dedicated to a single edition of a specific publication. In the case of the most recent podcast, they take on The Beano Annual 2025, discussing its contents and appeal, the characters and stories featured plus their thoughts on and off topic.

The Beano comic first appeared in 1938 and is still available to this day. The Beano brand has not only survived as a weekly publication but thrived into the 21st century mindset with numerous commercial spin-offs, television cartoon series, plus the ever-popular annual that appears in time to provide a seasonable present for readers old and new. Our enthusiastic duo discuss the changes to the world of the Beano strips, their leading figures and thoughts on the modern approach now shown by the publication.

As someone who devoured most British comics from the time I could read, the storylines and characters represent modern life now, more politically correct and kind than in the past. Gone are the days when dad would threaten violence to his offspring with a slipper and youngsters could earn minimal pocket money by carrying out menial tasks.

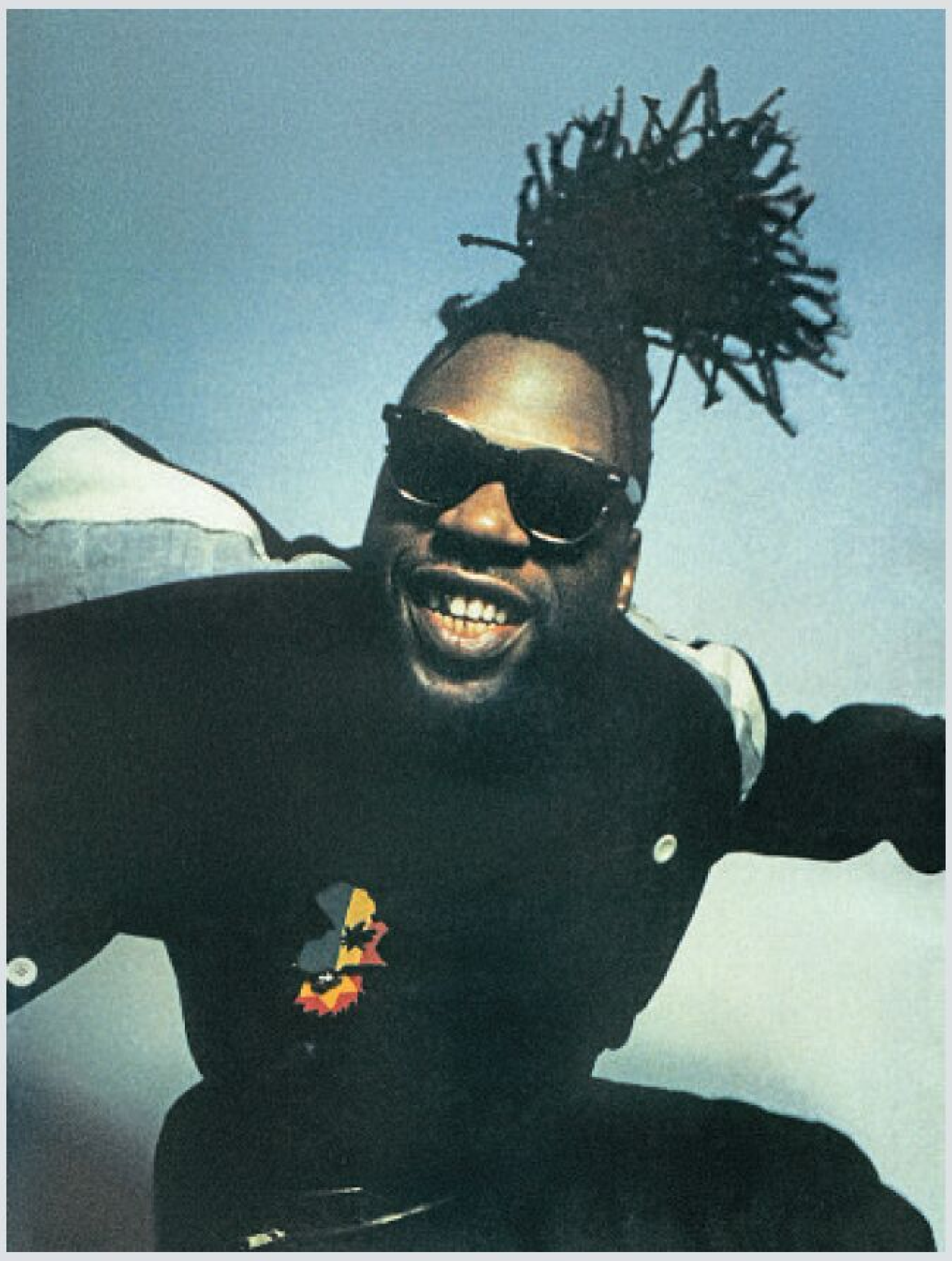
By the time you read this, the first podcast of 2025 will be available and meanwhile you can catch up on a variety of other comics from The Dandy to TV Comic and Whizzer and Chips. Essential listening for comic fans.

OUT&ABOUT

Places to go, people to see

The Face Magazine: Culture Shift

An exhibition of portraits from the pages of trailblazing magazine The Face is to open at the National Portrait Gallery, London on 20 February. Running until 18 May, The Face Magazine: Culture Shift will bring together more than 200 prints by over 80 photographers – including Sheila Rock, Stéphane Sednaoui, David LaChapelle, Corinne Day, Elaine Constantine, Juergen Teller and Sølve Sundsbø. With many images exhibited for the first time away from the magazine's pages, the NPG exhibition will explore the impact of The Face on eighties, nineties and noughties culture in Britain and beyond, as well as its influence today.


Soul II Soul's Jazzie B, photographed by Enrique Badulescu and styled by Adam Howe, April 1989.

The exhibition publication, The Face Magazine: Culture Shift, will be available to purchase in both hardback (£45) and paperback (£29.95), with the paperback exclusively available via the National Portrait Gallery's shop.

020 7306 0055, npg.org.uk

Listen In: How Radio Changed the Home

An exhibition that looks at how radio changed home life when it was the newest of new technologies opens at the Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford on 7 February. Coinciding with the centenary of the Daventry Transmitter, the world's first long wave transmitting station, the exhibition will focus on the first two decades of radio. Drawing on a rich range of visual and aural material, including two handwritten notebooks containing first-person testimony gathered in 1938 from listeners in Bristol, the exhibition will chart big changes such as radio's impact on family dynamics and its influence on dinnertime conversation. The exhibition, which runs until 31 August, is complemented by a series of events, including a live performance on Thursday 20 February where actors will perform extracts from the notebooks, while two musicians will perform a specially commissioned score by composer Emily Levy.

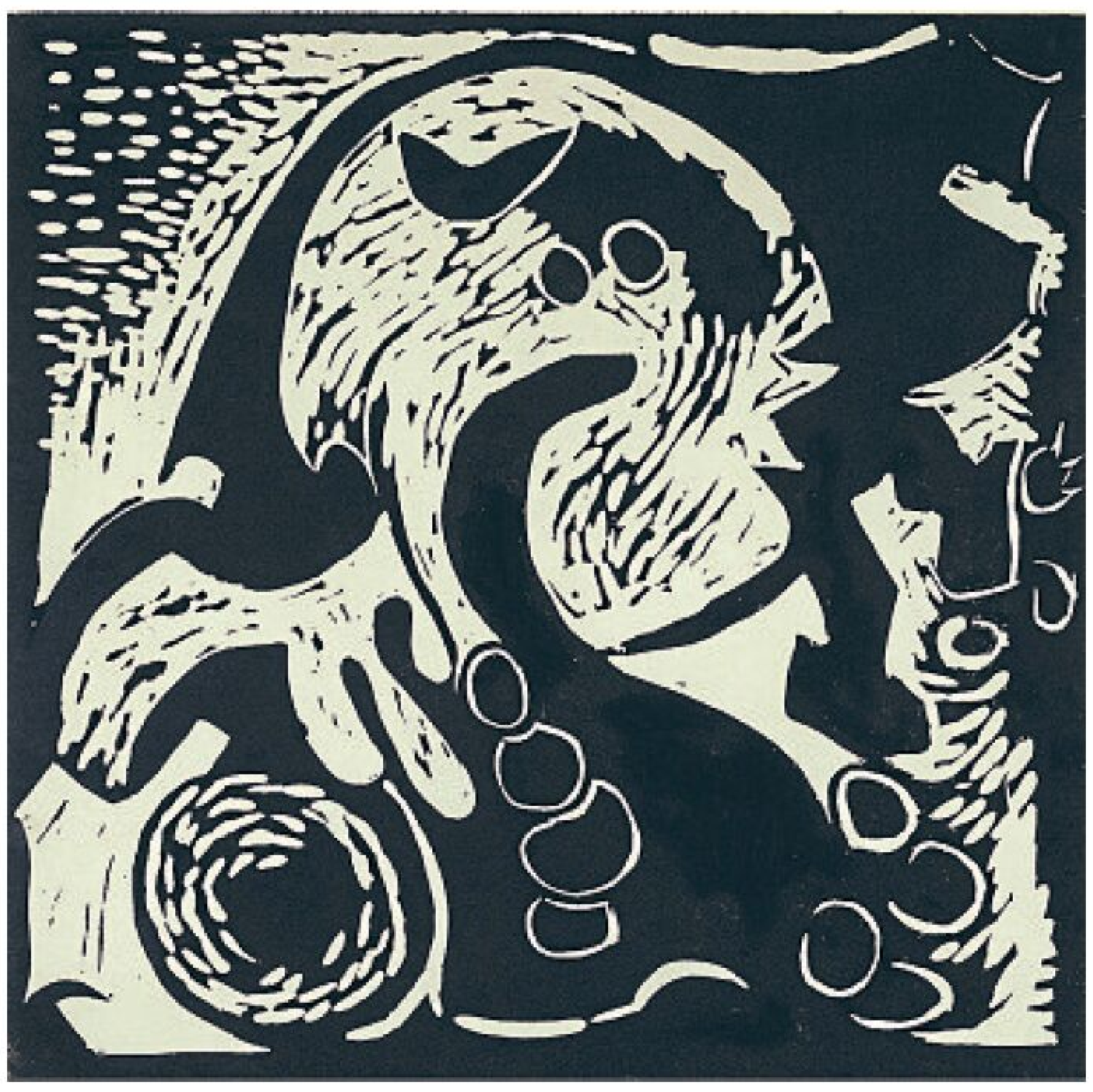
01865 287400, visit.bodleian.ox.ac.uk

Focusing on the first two decades of radio, the exhibition looks at how radio changed home life.

Inked Up: Printmaking in Scotland

One of the most richly diverse areas of the visual arts is the subject of an exhibition at City Art Centre, Edinburgh. Inked Up: Printmaking in Scotland celebrates this versatile artform, presenting a selection of works from the centre's permanent collection of fine art. The exhibition showcases both historic and contemporary prints, with examples of relief printing, intaglio printing, lithography and screenprinting. Featured artists include Wilhelmina Barns-Graham, Muirhead Bone, DY Cameron, James Munro, Willie Rodger, Leena Nammari, Eduardo Paolozzi and Anne Redpath. Running until 1 June, the exhibition is complemented by a series of accessible tours and talks.

0131 529 3993, edinburghmuseums.org.uk/venue/city-art-centre


Right: Jazzer, a relief print made by artist and musician James Munro in 1985.

Photographs: (Jazzie B) Enrique Badulescu, (Inked Up) The estate of James Munro, (Royal Observatory) National Maritime Museum London

NOT TO BE MISSED

Outlaws: Fashion Renegades of 80s London

(Until 9 March)
Centred around the legendary nightclub Taboo, the exhibition displays original garments and accessories from Leigh Bowery and more than 30 designers including John Galliano, plus photography, film and artworks.
Fashion and Textile Museum, London,
020 7407 8664,
fashiontextilemuseum.org

Earth Photo Exhibition

(01-28 February)
An international competition and exhibition created by Forestry England and the Royal Geographical Society to showcase photographs and videos that document the natural world.
The Lost Gardens of Heligan, St Austell, Cornwall
01726 845100, heligan.com

Scramble! The Summer of 1940

(Until 23 February)
Telling the story of the aircraft and aircrew who fought in the Battles of Britain and France over the summer of 1940. Explore the history of these two campaigns, see the aircraft up close, and discover the story of "the Few".
IWM Duxford, Duxford, Cambridgeshire
020 7416 5000, iwm.org.uk

A World of Form and Colour

(Until 23 February)
The most comprehensive survey ever of the work of Vanessa Bell, presenting a picture of the entire range of her practice through more than 120 works, covering paintings, drawings, furniture, ceramics, designs for murals, advertising and book covers.
MK Gallery, Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire
01908 676900, mkgallery.org

POP LIFE

(Until 09 March)
Underscoring the enduring allure of the human form as a reflection of identity and societal norms, drawing inspiration from art history, socio-political movements and cultural shifts over the past six decades.
City Art Centre, 2 Market Street, Edinburgh
0131 529 3993, edinburghmuseums.org.uk

Un/Common People: Folk Culture in Wessex

(Until 09 March)
Unlocking the collections of Wessex Museums to discover the extraordinary, creative ways that people express themselves through art, traditions and celebrations.
Museum & Art Swindon, Swindon, Wiltshire
01793 466556, swindonmuseumandartgallery.org.uk

ATTRACTION OF THE MONTH

The Royal Observatory Greenwich

Founded 350 years ago by Charles II to find a solution to measuring longitude at sea, the Royal Observatory Greenwich was one of the most important scientific institutions in Britain.

The astronomers royal created maps of the stars and calculated ways to use the moon to measure longitude before John Harrison, a carpenter and clockmaker, invented an accurate watch in 1759. His revolutionary timekeepers are on display in the Time and Longitude gallery.

The Royal Observatory Greenwich is also the home of Greenwich Mean Time and the Prime Meridian, the line where east meets west. A time ball was installed in 1833 to allow sailors docked along the Thames to synchronise their chronometers to 1pm GMT. Visitors to the observatory can also see the 28-inch Great Equatorial Telescope, the largest refracting telescope in Britain, which was installed in 1893, and London's only planetarium.

What to Eat: The Astronomy Café and Terrace offers a selection of hot and cold lunch options, as well as being only a short walk from Greenwich town centre, with a variety of restaurants and Greenwich Market.

Disabled Access: There is step-free access to the Observatory when coming from Greenwich and Blackheath. The planetarium is fully accessible via a lift. Step-free access to the Time in Greenwich and Time and Longitude galleries is via an external lift in the Astronomer's Garden. There is no step-free access to the Time and Society gallery, the Great Equatorial Telescope, the Camera Obscura (the two steps, one 8cm high and one 17cm high, may be possible to navigate with some wheelchairs) and the upper floor of Flamsteed House. The Royal Observatory and all other Royal Museums Greenwich sites have accessible toilets, and the cafes and gift shops are wheelchair accessible. British Sign Language supported and subtitled film and touchscreens are available at selected points within the permanent galleries across all the sites. Induction loops for hearing aids are fitted at all site information desks and in the planetarium.

How to get here: Located at the top of Castle Hill in Greenwich Park (royalparks.org.uk/visit/parks/greenwich-park), there is parking available within the park as well as at the National Maritime Museum. Access via public transport (0343 222 1234, tfl.gov.uk) is available via the DLR to Greenwich or Cutty Sark. Overground to Greenwich, Maze Hill or Blackheath and local buses available head towards Woolwich, Charlton, Deptford, Lewisham and North Greenwich.

Opening Times and Admissions: Open daily, 10am-5pm with the last entry at 4.15pm. Summer late entry is available from June to the end of August, 10am-7.45pm with last entry at 7pm. Tickets priced £24 (adult), £12 (child, 4-15), £18 (young person/student). Free admission for under 4s, Blue Light card holders and one person accompanying disabled visitors. Joint tickets with Cutty Sark also available.

Royal Observatory Greenwich, Blackheath Avenue, Greenwich, London SE10 8XJ
(020 8858 4422, rmg.co.uk/royal-observatory)

DIARY DATES

GREAT BRITISH EVENTS

🟥 **SOUTH WEST OF ENGLAND**
Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Somerset, Wiltshire, Channel Islands

🟦 **SOUTH EAST OF ENGLAND AND LONDON**
Bedfordshire, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Hampshire, Hertfordshire, Kent, Middlesex, Surrey, Sussex, Isle of Wight

🟪 **WEST OF ENGLAND**
Gloucestershire, Herefordshire, Oxfordshire, Shropshire, Worcestershire

🟨 **EAST OF ENGLAND**
Cambridgeshire, Essex, Lincolnshire, Norfolk, Suffolk

🟧 **MIDLANDS**
Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Northamptonshire, Nottinghamshire, Rutland, Staffordshire, Warwickshire

⬛ **NORTH OF ENGLAND**
Cheshire, County Durham, Cumbria, Greater Manchester, Lancashire, Merseyside, Northumberland, Tyne & Wear, Yorkshire, Isle of Man

🟥 **WALES**

🟦 **SCOTLAND**

🟩 **NORTHERN IRELAND**

SOUTH WEST OF ENGLAND

02 HAYNES BREAKFAST CLUB (8AM-NOON)

Bringing together like-minded motor enthusiasts to meet and share their automotive passion and enjoy breakfast. This month's theme is hot hatches. Booking essential. Spectator tickets available.
Haynes Motor Museum, Yeovil, Somerset
01963 442788, haynesmuseum.org

06 CASTLE TOUR (11AM-NOON)

Join a guided walk around the castle to discover Durlston's history. No need to book, just turn up at castle reception. Free tour but donations (cash or card) greatly appreciated.
Durlston Country Park, Swanage, Dorset
01929 424443, durlston.co.uk

08-09 SOUTH WEST MODEL SHOW

Traders, exhibitors and modelling demonstrations alongside the real thing. Model planes, ships, trains and tanks of all types and sizes will be available to see, make and buy.
The Tank Museum, Bovington, Dorset
01929 405096, tankmuseum.org

18 HIGH ANGLE BATTERY ON PORTLAND | STEVE WALLIS (2-3PM)

Join Dorset Council's senior archaeologist Steve Wallis for an afternoon talk on a project to preserve the heritage site of High Angle Battery on Portland.
Dorset Museum & Art Gallery, Dorchester, Dorset
01305 262735, dorsetmuseum.org

25 BEHIND THE SCENES – COLLECTIONS TOUR (1.30-2.30PM)

Join a member of the archive team for an exclusive look behind the scenes. Learn how the collections are managed, maintained and moved across the site. Booking essential.
The Box, Plymouth, Devon
01752 304774, theboxplymouth.com

SOUTH EAST OF ENGLAND AND LONDON

01 GUIDED TOUR: CIVIC CENTRE CLOCK TOWER TOUR (10.15-11.15AM)

Ascend the Civic Centre's iconic clock tower. Climb all 215 steps and discover the incredible story of its construction as well as gaining unparalleled views of the city. Booking essential.
SeaCity Museum, Southampton, Hampshire
023 8083 4536, seacitymuseum.co.uk

06 THE HIGGINS HIGHLIGHTS TOUR (11.15AM-12.15PM)

An introductory tour of the highlights of The Higgins Bedford featuring Bedford's heritage. Booking essential.
The Higgins Bedford, Bedford, Bedfordshire
01234 718044, thehigginsbedford.org.uk

12 CURATOR TALKS (2-2.30PM)

Join the collections team for gallery talks that will shine a light on the fascinating stories inspired by the objects on display. Booking essential.
National Museum of the Royal Navy, Portsmouth Historic Dockyard, Portsmouth, Hampshire
023 9289 1370, nmrn.org.uk/visit-us/portsmouth-historic-dockyard

22 ART AND POSTER STORE TOUR (11AM-1PM, 2-4PM)

Explore the artwork and poster store and hear the story behind London Underground poster commissioning, from its roots in 1908 to later collaborations with renowned artists. Booking essential.
London Transport Museum, Acton Depot, London

0343 222 5000, ltmuseum.co.uk

24 CONCORDE TECHNICAL TOUR (10AM-1PM)

Explore the fascinating technical achievements of the aircraft, visit the flight deck and Concorde simulator. Includes museum admission.
Brooklands Museum, Weybridge, Surrey
01932 857381, brooklandsmuseum.com

WEST OF ENGLAND

09 HENLEY AND DISTRICT THEATRE ORGAN TRUST (3PM)

Join Tom Horton for an afternoon of musical entertainment from films, shows and dance music playing the mighty Allen digital theatre organ.
Town Hall, Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire
0118 972 4988, henleyorgantrust.org.uk

15 MEDIEVAL MERCENARY TOUR OF THE EASTGATE CHAMBER (2-3PM)

Join medieval mercenary Sir Miles for a fascinating visit underground to the Eastgate chamber. Find out all about its history including myths and superstitions. Booking essential.
The Museum of Gloucester, Gloucester, Gloucestershire
01452 396131, museumofgloucester.co.uk

16 & 19 FREE HERITAGE BUS RIDES

Free buses will depart Oxford Bus Museum at 12.15pm and 2.15pm (and 1pm on 19). Browse buses, Morris motors and historic cycles in the museum. Cafe open.
Oxford Bus Museum, Long Hanborough, Witney, Oxfordshire
01993 883617, oxfordbusmuseum.org

22-23 STEAM DAYS

Travel back in time to the golden age of the Great Western Railway and savour the sights, sounds and smells of steam with trains dating from Victorian times to the 1960s.
Didcot Railway Centre, Didcot, Oxfordshire
01235 817200, didcotrailwaycentre.co.uk

28 WILD HISTORY WALK (1.30-3.30PM)

Join a two-hour walk and find out why Sir Peter Scott chose Slimbridge to be the birthplace of modern conservation, followed by cream tea in the Kingfisher Kitchen. Booking essential.
WWT Slimbridge, Slimbridge, Gloucestershire
01453 891900, wwt.org.uk/wetland-centres/slimbridge

EAST OF ENGLAND

01-02 HST WINTER WARMER

Grab a hot drink and food from the onboard buffet while keeping warm in a heated coach. Four round trips both days calling at all stations while watching the winter scenery go by.
Nene Valley Railway, Stibbington, Peterborough, Cambridgeshire
01780 784444, nvr.org.uk

02 AN INTRODUCTION TO LONDONTHORPE'S MILITARY HISTORY GUIDED WALK (9.30AM-1PM)

An opportunity to discover the military history of Londonthorpe and Bellmount. Visit war graves at Londonthorpe church and enter Bellmount Tower. Free but booking essential.
Londonthorpe Woods car park, Grantham, Lincolnshire
0344 249 1895, nationaltrust.org.uk/belton-house

14 WINTER TALK – WWI TRENCH LIFE, USING CARTOONS AND SONGS (2.30-3.30PM)

Using cartoons and songs, Nigel will discuss the everyday life and conditions of British soldiers in the trenches on the Western Front in 1914-18.
Time & Tide, Great Yarmouth, Norfolk
01493 743930, museums.norfolk.gov.uk/time-tide

16 STEAM DAY (10AM-5PM)

Visit the museum and enjoy a ride in vintage wagons or carriages pulled by one of the restored steam engines as unlimited rides are operated during the day.
East Anglian Railway Museum, Wakes Colne, Colchester, Essex
01206 242524, earm.co.uk

23 WINTER BUS RUNNING DAY

Featuring a selection of vintage buses from the London Bus Company and other visiting vehicles, operating a number of special journeys, recreating local routes of yesteryear.
Epping Ongar Railway, Ongar, Essex
01277 365200, eorailway.co.uk

MIDLANDS

06-07 NEWARK INTERNATIONAL ANTIQUES & COLLECTOR'S FAIR

Whether you're a trade buyer, seasoned collector, curious shopper or an international buyer, there's up to 1,500 stands offering a wide range, including rare vinyl records and coins.
Newark Showground, Newark, Nottinghamshire
01636 702326, iacf.co.uk/newark

08 ROBIN HOOD TOWN TOUR (2-4.30PM)

Meet Robin Hood, follow the trail of historical facts and learn how simple ballads more than 700 years old grew into one of the greatest stories ever told. Booking recommended.
The Cross Keys pub, Fletcher Gate, Nottingham, Nottinghamshire
07941 210986, ezekialbone.com/robin-hood

14 A HISTORY OF THE CHATSWORTH ORCHID COLLECTION – WINTER TALK (11AM-NOON)

An expert-led talk about the fascinating history of the Chatsworth orchid collection. Includes tea and coffee.
Chatsworth, Bakewell, Derbyshire
01246 565300, chatsworth.org

15 RAILWAY 200 – THE NIGHT SHIFT

Step back in time and immerse yourself in the magic of the past while celebrating the 200th anniversary of the railways, with nostalgia, live entertainment, and railway experiences.
Rowsley South Station, Matlock, Derbyshire
01629 818022, peakrail.co.uk

21-23 UK GHOST STORY FESTIVAL 2025

Three days of spooky and supernatural interviews, talks, writing workshops, panels, book shopping and more, from an incredible line-up of writing and speaking talent.
Museum of Making, Derby, Derbyshire
01332 641901, derbymuseums.org/museum-of-making

NORTH OF ENGLAND

01 LAKELAND HISTORIC CAR CLUB (10AM-12.30PM)

Whether you're an owner, enthusiast or just keen to see some great examples of some classic local cars, everyone is welcome to this monthly event at the museum and Cafe Ambio.
Lakeland Motor Museum, Ulverston, Cumbria
015395 30400, lakelandmotormuseum.co.uk

01-23 SNOWDROPS IN THE WOODLAND

Wrap up warmly this winter and enjoy the breathtaking display of snowdrops blanketing the woodland in purest white.
Burton Agnes, Driffield, East Yorkshire
01262 490324, burtonagnes.com

07 CONSERVATION IN ACTION: LADY CHESTERFIELD'S VANITY CASE (10.30AM-3PM)

A chance to drop in to see the team undertaking essential conservation work in the hall and learn more about the process involved. No need to book. Free event (admission applies).
Beningbrough, York, North Yorkshire
01904 472027, nationaltrust.org.uk/beningbrough

15 FEBRUARY OPEN DAY

A free day of family-friendly activities. Enjoy a variety of events, from artist-led sessions and dance workshops with Eliot Smith Dance to themed tours. There's something for everyone.
The Bowes Museum, Barnard Castle, County Durham
01833 690606, thebowesmuseum.org.uk

23 & 27 HERITAGE TRAIN RIDES

Enjoy a four-mile return trip (35-40 minutes) following the route of the coal trains from the collieries to the River Tyne behind a vintage locomotive in 1950s passenger carriages.
Stephenson Steam Railway, North Shields, Tyne & Wear
0191 277 7135, stephensonsteamrailway.org.uk

WALES

01 REFLECTIONS LANTERN PARADE (5-7.30PM)

Enjoy a magical evening with storyteller Deb Winter and a short lantern procession created by artists Rob Jakes and Charlotte Cortazzi. Hot soup included in ticket. Booking essential.
Stackpole Estate, near Pembroke, Pembrokeshire
0344 249 1895, nationaltrust.org.uk/stackpole-estate

08-09 SNOWDROP WEEKEND (11AM-3PM)

Wrap up warm and soak in the early signs that spring is on its way as you enjoy the snowdrop display while you explore the garden and woodland. No need to book. Free event.
Plas yn Rhiw, Pwllheli, Gwynedd
01758 780219, nationaltrust.org.uk/plas-yn-rhiw

15 WALK WITH A WARDEN – FEBRUARY (11.30AM-1PM)

Weather and wildlife permitting, you will observe the overwintering wading birds, taking in their social behaviours and feeding styles. No need to book. Included in admission.
WWT Llanelli, Llanelli, Carmarthenshire
01554 741087, wwt.org.uk/wetland-centres/llanelli

26 AFTER DARK: SCIENCE ON SHOW (6-9PM)

A free hands-on science evening suitable for all the family. There will be lots of activities connected to sustainability as well as some favourites like the return of the robots.
National Museum Cardiff, Cathays Park, Cardiff
0300 111 2 333, museum.wales/cardiff

28 HERITAGE LANDSCAPE TOUR (11AM-1PM)

Discover more about the Regency Restoration project and the process which made two new dams, six new bridges and miles of new paths possible. Free with admission.
National Botanic Garden of Wales, Llanarthne, Carmarthenshire
01558 667177, botanicgarden.wales

SCOTLAND

02 ARTHUR'S AMBLE (1-2.30PM)

Enjoy a guided walk and learn more about Arthur's Seat's turbulent past as well as the people who lived and worked at Holyrood Park. Free but booking essential.
Holyrood Park, Edinburgh
0131 652 8150, historicenvironment.scot

09 GUIDED TOUR (NOON, 2PM)

See the Glasgow Vintage Vehicle Trust collection of more than 120 buses, fire engines and commercial vehicles, from fully restored vehicles to those under restoration. Booking essential.
Bridgeton Bus Garage, Glasgow
0141 554 0544, gvvt.org

20 BALLOCH CASTLE, A ROMANTIC HOUSE IN A SUBLIME LANDSCAPE WITH FERGUS SUTHERLAND (7.30-9.30PM)

Bought by Glasgow Council in 1914, Balloch Castle and estate on Loch Lomond is one of Glasgow's forgotten treasures. Fergus Sutherland will talk about the castle's history.
The Renfield Training and Conference Centre, Glasgow, 0131 557 0019, ahss.org.uk

21-23 MODEL RAIL SCOTLAND 2025 (10.30AM)

Scotland's biggest model railway show is a must for every railway enthusiast with layouts of various scales and eras.
Scottish Event Campus, Glasgow
modelrail-scotland.co.uk

26 COLLECTION CENTRE TOURS (10.30-11.45AM, 1-2.15PM)

Go behind the scenes and discover the secrets of how collections are stored and used in international research. Booking essential.
National Museums Collection Centre, Granton, Edinburgh
0131 247 4470, nms.ac.uk

NORTHERN IRELAND

01-28 WHITE STAR PREMIUM PASS (11AM, 1PM)

Explore the Titanic Experience, together with SS Nomadic, an authentic piece of Belfast's industrial heritage, as well as the award-winning guided Discovery Tour. Booking essential.
Titanic Belfast, Titanic Quarter, Belfast
028 9076 6386, titanicbelfast.com

12 ASPECTS OF THE HISTORY OF GROOMSPORT

Peter Gibson will introduce you to personalities such as Conn O'Neill, James Hamilton, the Duke of Schonberg and the Maxwells, all of whom played a key role in the village's history.
Londonderry Room, Ards Arts Centre, Newtownards, County Down
ardshistoricalsociety.com

● Details correct at time of going to press – please confirm with event organisers before travelling.

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PUZZLE SOLUTIONS

Twenty Questions

1. Mark McManus who was born on 21 February 1935.
2. Ralph Bates who was born on 12 February 1940.
3. Elkie Brooks who was born on 25 February 1945.
4. Dame Julie Walters who was born on 22 February 1950.
5. Howard Jones who was born on 23 February 1955.
6. The HMS Ark Royal which was commissioned on 22 February 1955.
7. Paul Abbott who was born on 22 February 1960.
8. Stan Laurel who died on 23 February 1965.
9. Simon Pegg who was born on 14 February 1970.
10. Sir PG Wodehouse who died on 14 February 1975.
11. Ray Ellington who died on 27 February 1985.
12. Michael Powell who died on 19 February 1990.
13. Robert Bolt who died on 20 February 1995.
14. Bridget Jones.
15. Sir Stanley Matthews who died on 23 February 2000.
16. Sir John Dankworth who died on 6 February 2010.
17. Pamela Cundell who died on 14 February 2015.
18. Pearl Carr who died on 16 February 2020.
19. Michael Medwin who died on 26 February 2020.
20. Frances Cuka who died on 16 February 2020.

And I quote…
Fred Perry who died on 2 February 1995.

What is it?
A steam whistle taken from a Great Western Railway locomotive.

Dialect Detective
1b, 2a, 3a, 4d

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Treasures in the Attic : 1. Help! album £50, 2. Billy Liar book £4, 3. Model bus kit £35, 4. Canal painting £50, 5. Blackbird pie funnel £20, 6. 1970s tea packet £15, 7. STAR ITEM Bolesworth's Prize Dairy cream pot £1,000, 8. Airship toffee tin £250, 9. Cinema club badge £10, 10. Cocoa whisk £30, 11. Toy car transporter £45, 12. Robin Starch sign £500.

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BACK IN TIME WITH COLIN BAKER

BoB's very own Time Lord recalls his family's cars, Sunday afternoon entertainment and the perils of letting someone else drive his Sprite

It is perhaps revealing that I can remember the makes, models and registration numbers of all the cars that my father drove up until the point when I started driving myself at the age of 19, when my father had a heart attack and could no longer drive, and I had to get behind the wheel. Cars were slightly more special back then; the passage of time has rendered them as commonplace as a pair of shoes. You need them to get from A to whichever other letter of the alphabet floats your boat, so for most of us it's not that big a deal. I once owned, and was quite fond of, a Skoda.

Our very first family vehicle was a beige Hillman Minx, registration number LND39. I would have been in my early teens when suddenly the Baker family became less obsessed with the minutiae of bus timetables or ensuring that the bike was oiled and its tyres pumped up. That's also when something that I haven't done for more than 60 years became a regular Sunday afternoon ritual. "Going for a drive." We would all pile into the Minx and drive somewhere – whether it be over the Pennines to Yorkshire or into Derbyshire – to visit a stately home or descend into the illuminated depths of a cave with dripping stalactites and proud standing stalagmites.

That was what you did in the 1950s. Well, it was what we did. Church in the morning, roast lunch accompanied by the BBC Light Programme with Cliff Michelmore and Family Favourites followed by Educating Archie, Ray's a Laugh or Life With the Lyons, and then "a drive" and back in time for Take it from Here with Jimmy Edwards in the early evening. This of course was back when television (which, like many, we acquired for the coronation) was an evening only activity with just one channel.

So, the Hillman Minx was, in every sense of the word, a ticket to ride that opened the north-west up to us as a family. When my father got promotion, he upgraded the Hillman to another Rootes product, a blue Humber Hawk Mark VI (PNA 423) which seemed very grand indeed to us at the time. Two years later, that gave way to another Humber Hawk (499 BTC) and that is where my registration number memory stops for some reason. I know the number of my present car because it is FUN (by pure chance) but the half dozen or more that I have owned prior to that are now long forgotten. Had we stayed loyal to the Rootes Group, my papa's next trade-up would have been to a Super Snipe but he switched loyalties when he became a company director and acquired a Jaguar Mark 2, like the one later immortalised by Inspector Morse.

The first car that I actually owned was an Austin Healey (Frogeye) Sprite, which I loved, though I cannot remember its registration number now for the life of me. But I do remember the girlfriend in 1966 who was very pretty and who nagged me into submission to let her have a go at driving it in some woods near Capel in Surrey. She drove it into a tree, then begged me not to tell her father that she was driving (even though it wasn't on a public road). I took the blame, and her father wouldn't let her go out with me again.

Lesson learned. I hope she reads this… Her name was Susie. She'll be around 76 now. I wonder how many cars she went on to write off.

Colin's father owned a succession of Rootes Group vehicles including a Humber Hawk Mk VI.

Photograph: Creative Commons/Charles01

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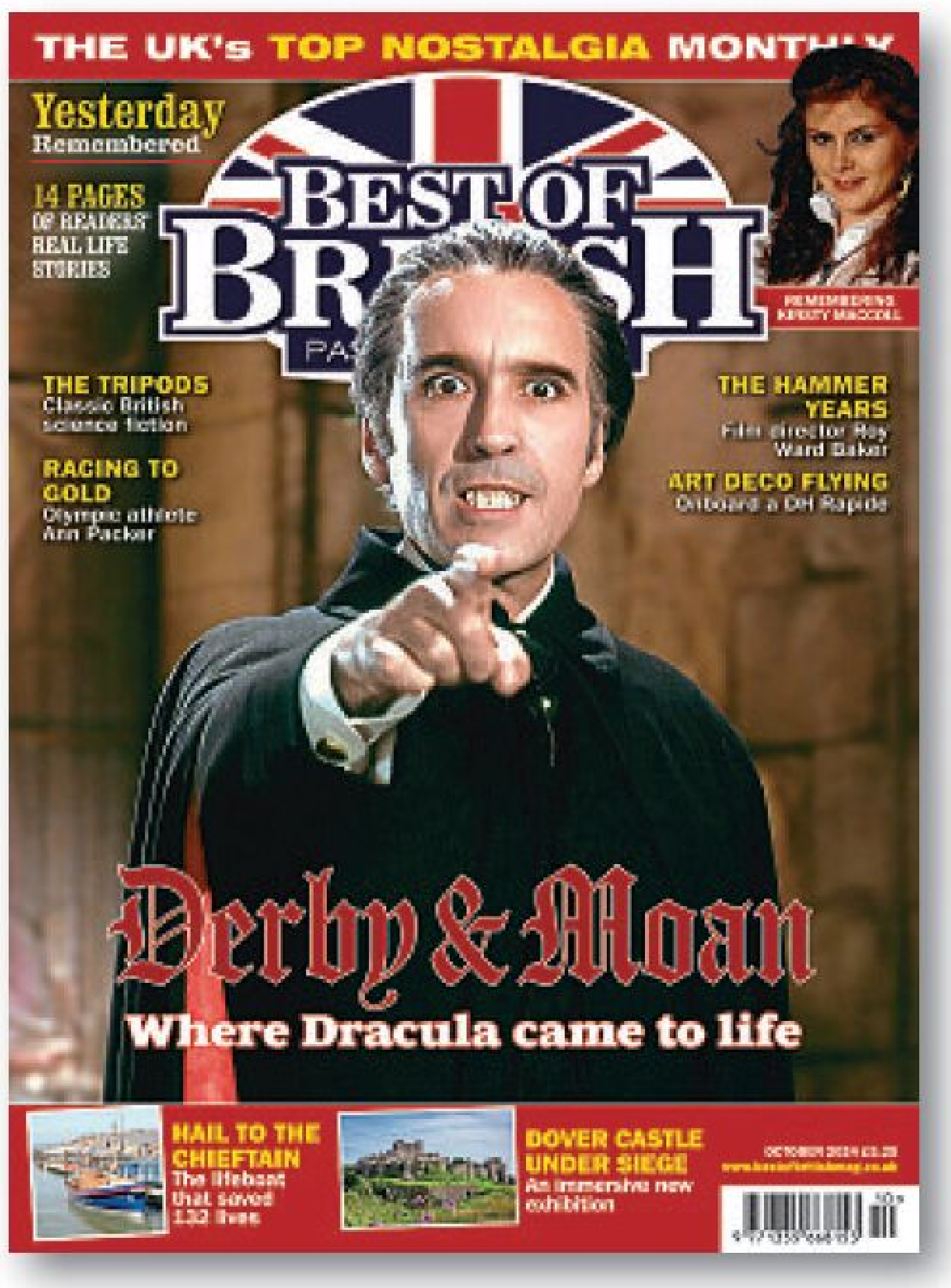
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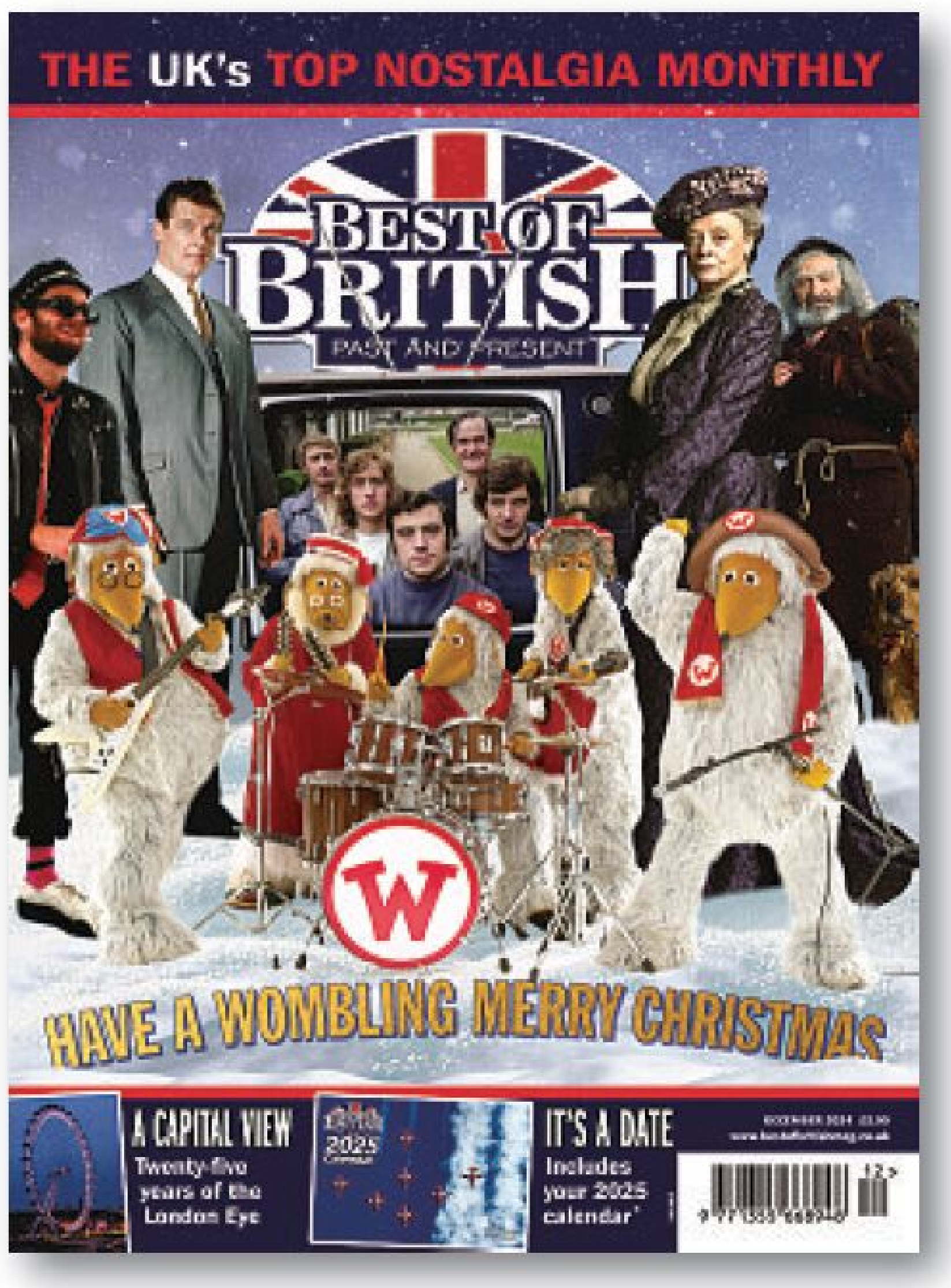
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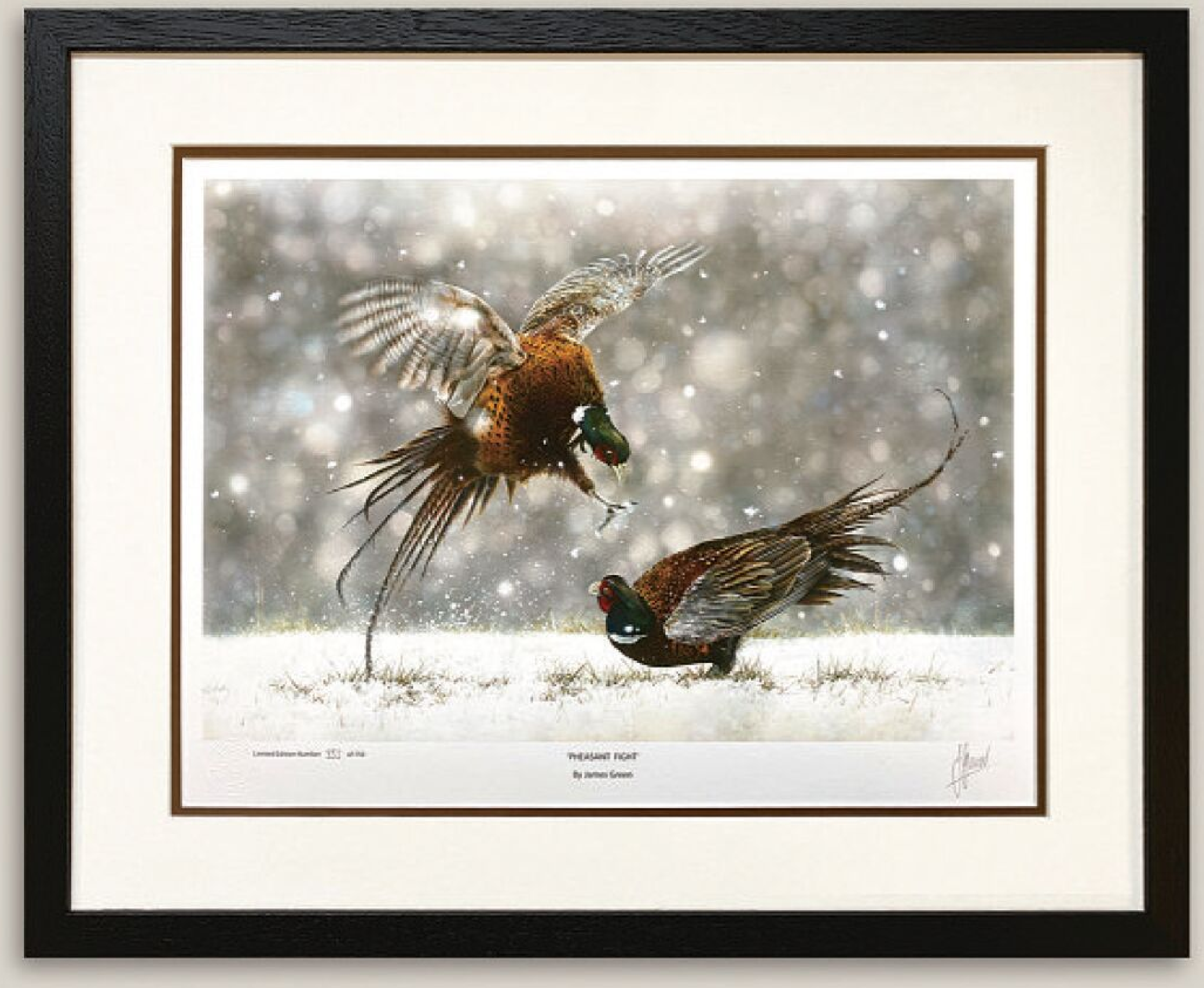

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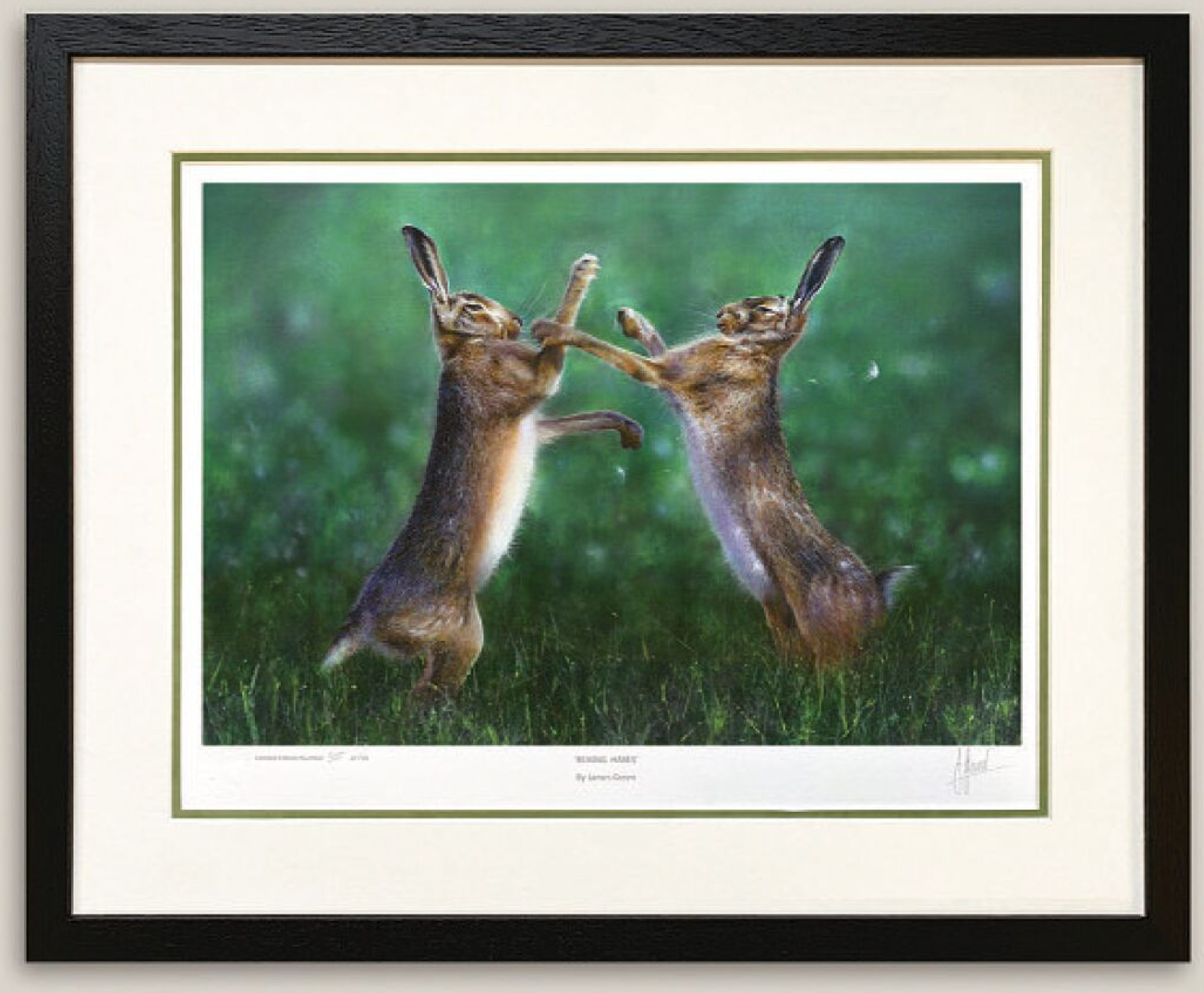

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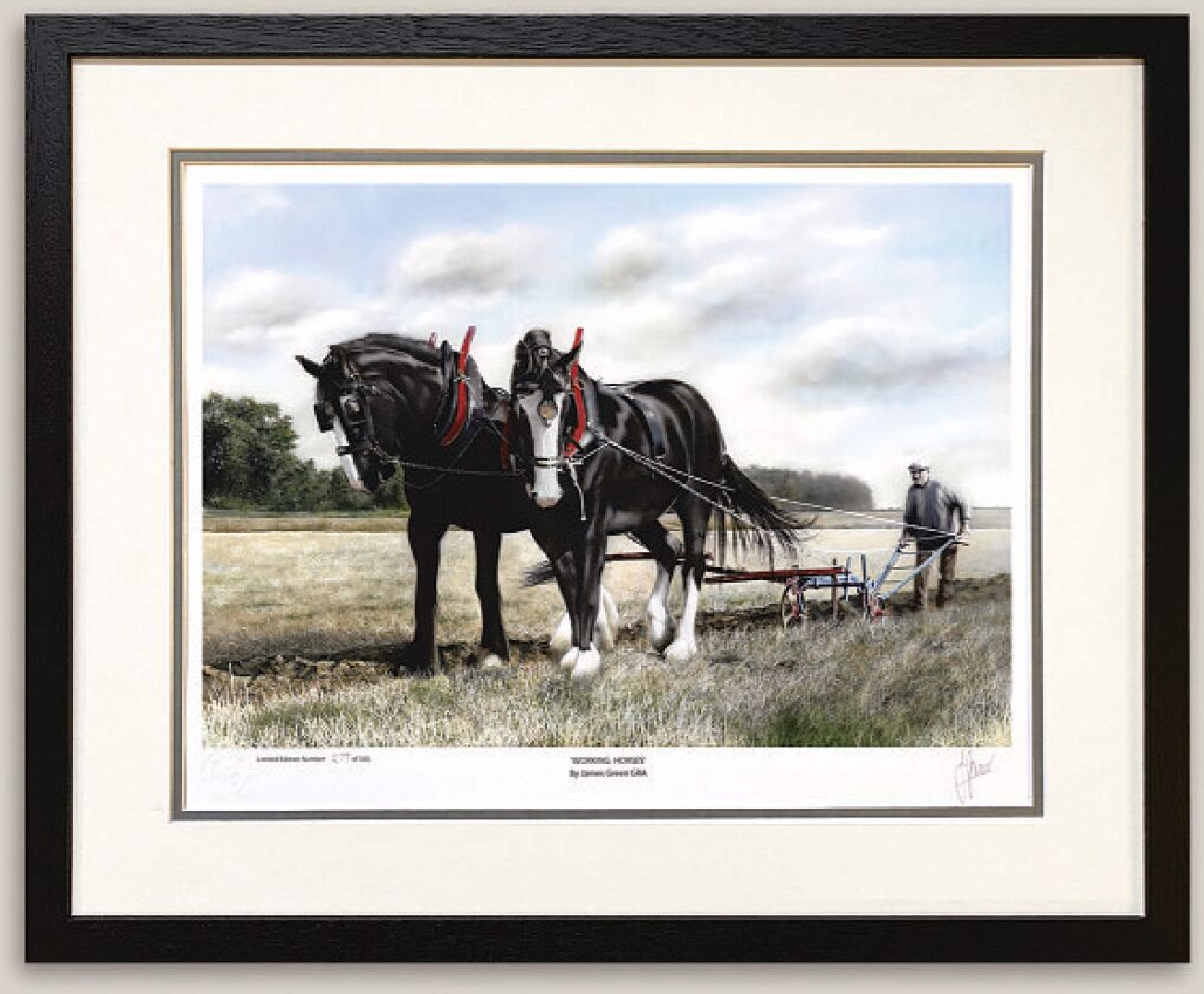

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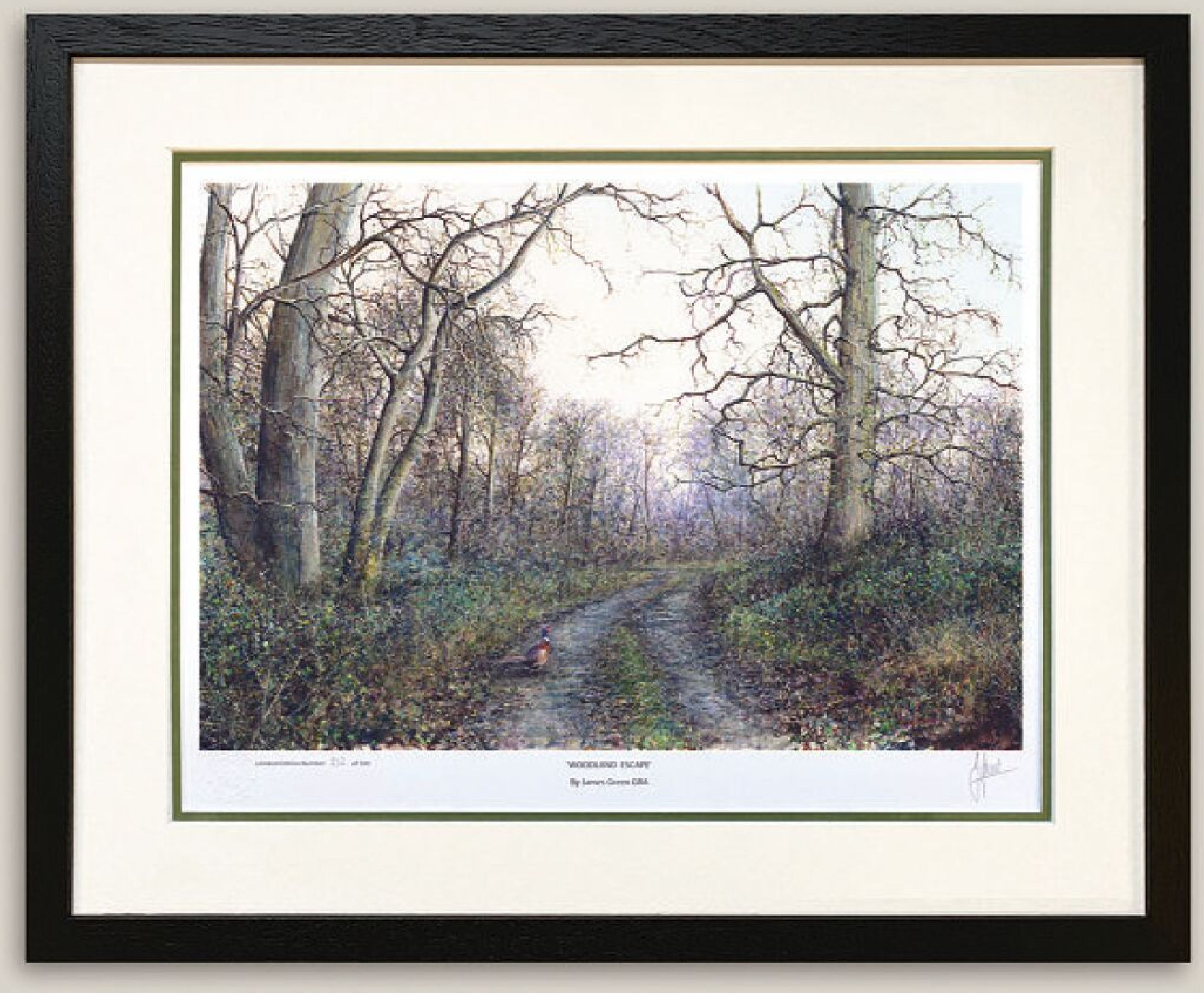

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